

The Testament of
LAZARUS

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN GOSPEL OF JOHN



JANET TYSON

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It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.

—Epictetus

INTRODUCTION

At the present moment, many sense that the quest of the historical Jesus is lurching towards a cul-de-sac which will soon be requiring us to wheel around and try a different route.¹

THERE IS NO ACADEMIC MONOPOLY on the story of Jesus. You can either accept the traditional interpretations and theories put forward by others, or you can do as Jesus himself advises Nicodemus in the Gospel of John (commonly and here referred to as “the FG”) and start from the beginning, as a child, learning for yourself. It is not an easy journey.

During my final year as an undergraduate and throughout my graduate degree, I consumed every scrap of information out there but conventional, mainstream interpretations of and commentaries on the FG left me frustrated with the overwhelming lack of answers to the questions I was asking. My approach, therefore, was more like a scientific experiment, in that I had a few of my own theories but I needed to put them to the test. The original audiences of the Gospel of John, however literate or ‘in tune’ with the author’s methods, still had only the testament itself and their cultural history to draw upon. The entire meaning and purpose of the text must be decipherable from that foundation alone. Like Nicodemus, I chose to start with a clean slate.

The FG has gone down in history as an enigmatic, esoteric, almost metaphysical entity that all but defies complete understanding; I will attempt to prove that this is because the ‘same old’ interpretations, the familiar translations, and the comfortable perspectives have all but blinded us to its reality. I proudly saw *myself* as an academic for many years. I got straight As at university and won a much-coveted graduate fellowship—but when my own reading of the FG started to take shape, I felt I had to completely ignore my Christian upbringing and attempt to get into the headspace of a first-century Jew or Samaritan, which was not an easy task (and, to this end, I acknowledge the profoundly important early Jewish sources that I discovered much later in the process, when I sought confirmation or clarity).

¹ Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Priest* (London: SPCK, 2018), 33.

I was, initially, akin to a Pharisee, saying “I’ve read everything, therefore I *know*”; I soon learned I knew very little. I later learned this was the best possible place to begin a quest to comprehend the enigmatic Gospel of John.

If the FG is such a mysterious text, and seemingly so different in nature to Mathew, Mark, and Luke, why do we persist in trying to make it comprehensible *in light* of these other versions of the Jesus story, rather than allowing it, simply, to speak for itself? This rigid juxtaposition between the Synoptics on the one hand, and the FG on the other is inevitably restrictive, for focus is drawn away from the most meaningful internal elements and placed on such matters as its chronology, authorship, dating, and ethnicity (i.e., Judean or Hellenistic). Although these *are* significant to a full understanding of the gospel, I argue that these concerns ‘fall into place’ when the *narrative* of the text is first comprehended. By this I do not mean the precise translation of every word by linguists; I mean understanding the subtleties of homophonic puns, wordplay to infer alternative meaning, symbolism, repetition, numerology, etc. The language of the gospel, though Greek, follows the same patterns of expression and the same literary techniques as many of the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. Finding these patterns is necessary, as they allow the text to lead you to where you need to be, mentally; this is basically what Jesus tells Nicodemus, i.e., ‘open your mind and see the way’.

One of the strongest patterns is the constant and consistent use of intertextuality, where the gospel’s words relate directly to a precedent in the Hebrew texts. Many commentators find the allusions but then fail to draw out the intended meaning because the original *context* is not assessed. There are no gratuitous “quotations” of scripture in the FG. There were no chapter-verse delineations in Jesus’ day, so relevant context can span a few lines, or a few pages; sometimes it is a pointer to what a person says, or to what is done to them. When you ‘see’ the necessary allusion, it makes complete sense. The FG uses this technique so much, I *did* begin to wonder if the entire gospel and its testament of Jesus’ campaign was invented purely from the precedent passages; it would be possible. In the end, however, I decided that the author, Lazarus, was simply a proficient, imaginative, and skilled scribe, using the Old Testament texts to convey his assertion that everything Jesus said and did *was* “written.”

The FG is also known for its emphasis on duality, i.e., its use of contrasts, such as light/darkness, truth/lies, above/below, etc., encouraging its readers to delve deeper into the meaning of the text that tells the story. There is not one meaning, the author urges us, there are (at least) two, and this also holds true for names, places, and relationships. This is one of the most vital clues to unlocking the FG narrative, which is written almost as a cypher, a challenge to those ‘with eyes to see’ to crack and thereby truly

“follow” Jesus. The original gospel was *not* intended for everyone; there is a definite winnowing going on within its text. Several times in the FG there are instances where Jesus could just declare himself outright, declare his intentions, his affiliations but he doesn’t. That would defeat the purpose, be too easy.

The gospel records far more about who Jesus was, what he attempted to do, and the repercussions of his actions than has ever been acknowledged; it is an attempt by Jesus’ right-hand-man, Lazarus (other hands are also evident in the narrative), to preserve the truth about the man he followed ... all the way to the ‘new kingdom’. It is a chronicle of an attempted coup that went horribly wrong and yet, thanks to Lazarus’ scribal skills and ability to act as a spin-doctor, Jesus’ mission became *symbolically* profound and scripturally vindicated. This mission, to be clear, was *not* to herald the dawn of Christianity. This investigation will demonstrate that the Gospel of John, the FG, proved so at odds with the new Christian tenets being promulgated by Paul, he all but outlawed it. This suggests that the FG is not the “Fourth Gospel,” but the “First Gospel.” It *is* also, despite opposition to this claim, a truly gnostic gospel; it reveals secret knowledge to those who have learned how to find it.

I realised about ten years ago that I was *not* the only one seeing certain patterns and apparently alternative ‘facts’ in the FG; for centuries there have been poets, artists, mythmakers, who took from the gospel most of what you will find in this book, and turned it into works of art that served as hiding places for the “truth.” I discovered several over the years.

Although the approach taken in developing this investigation is somewhat maverick, challenges orthodoxy, and probably challenges credulity at times, it has reaped profound results. It has been a once-in-a-lifetime project. I do hope the ensuing opus is testament to the perseverance of a curious mind and inspires others to pursue any loose ends I might leave, or any parallel trains of thought that could further enlighten us. When you look through only one eye you see one image; when you look through both you see two, slightly offset. The brain does its magic and understands the three-dimensional world. The FG has been read with one eye, so to speak; a post-Synoptic, non-historical type of eye. Now I propose an alternative vision, in the hopes that we can at least agree that there is something far more three-dimensional going on in this ancient document.

Prepare to leave the cul-de-sac!

(The NRSV is used for English quotations; translations of the Greek are attributed to *Strong’s Concordance*.)

1

SAMARITAN FOUNDATIONS

[T]he suggestion that Jesus and his disciples were Samaritans [is] a view that could hardly be entertained seriously—and has accordingly been assigned to the limbo of scholarly footnotes.¹

THIS IS PRECISELY THE SENTIMENT that has kept the search for the historical Jesus running around in circles (in that ‘cul-de-sac’) for years. Rather than accepting that something more has to be done to make sense of the Samaritan elements in the FG, scholars seem to find it simpler to ridicule the notion that Jesus may, in fact, have Samaritan blood running through his veins. Most wash their hands of it, for fear it may jeopardize their own careers, or perhaps because it forces them to rethink the entire history of Christian faith in the Davidic messiah.

Jesus is notoriously difficult to pigeon-hole conveniently into the available options. It has generally been decided that he does not qualify as one of the many self-appointed kings of the time (such as described in Josephus, *Wars*. 2.4.3; 2.13. 5, etc.) because these kings are so obviously militant, self-imposed leaders who wreak violence. Can Jesus possibly be associated with such political display? Well, actually, yes, to a degree, and although he rejects one sort of kingship (in the FG), he fully accepts another.

Neither, it is generally claimed, does he fit well into the familiar mindset of the Zealots, who condone the use of *extreme force* to remove the current ministers of the temple priesthood and replace them with influential partisans who support Jewish independence and autonomy. The FG Jesus is not *overtly* violent toward the cultus though, again, there is reason to doubt a complete passivity, and his political agenda is different to that of the Zealots’. He does not bump off the priests, he attempts to convert them! However, there is evidence to suggest that Jesus might have bitten off a little more than he can chew late in his campaign, when violence does lead to some serious consequences.

¹ James D. Purvis, “The Fourth Gospel and the Samaritans,” *Novum Testamentum* 17.3 (1975): 161–98, here 169, citing H. Hammer, 1913.

Despite common tradition, the Christian tradition, Jesus does not even reflect the accepted perception of the Davidic messiah, i.e., one who is from the house of David and who emancipates Israel from oppression (in this context, from Herodian/Roman dominance) through military or political means. The FG, in fact, is conspicuous by its total *lack* of interest in a Davidic representation of Jesus. There is only one reference to a Davidic messiah in the FG and this appears in John 7:42, where the *expectations* of such a figure are emphasized. At no stage does the FG Jesus refute these expectations but consistently throughout the narrative he demonstrates his aversion to the role for himself.

That Jesus is not successful in his role as deliverer in the *Davidic* sense does not seem to be an obstacle for the author of the Matthean gospel but one can discern elements of caution and confusion in the Gospel of Mark, evident in the so-called ‘messianic secret’ device, where the rationale behind Jesus’ mission is somewhat obscured (e.g., Mark 1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30; 9:9). Indeed, later Jewish literature of the Mediaeval Period preserves a view of Jesus the Nazarene that precludes his possible contention for the position of the Davidic messiah *because* he had failed to free the nation from its oppressors. To the later Jewish mind, Jesus was *one of many* who were to make the way straight for the messianic king.

The Remnant of Joseph

The Samaritan link in the FG *must* make sense; it is there and cannot be swept under the carpet. I suggest the answer lies in the ancient tradition that Joseph had succeeded in preserving a “remnant on earth” (Gen 45:7) of the original, divinely ordained Israel. By appointing only one family as the beneficiary of the new hereditary priesthood, Aaron is challenged and ultimately rejected by those who initially agree to accept him (and Moses) into their tribe, on the understanding that “all the congregation” will be considered holy (Num 16:3).

Consequently, the fact that Aaron is stripped of his vestments on Mount Hor (Num 20:22–8) suggests something more than a mere handing over of the vestments of office. The Hebrew word employed here is *pashat*, which means to plunder, to deploy in hostile array, to invade, etc., thus implying a stronger, more violent image than, perhaps, *sheylal* (to strip naked) would have done (see 1 Sam 19:24, Job 19:9). What seems to be implied, then, by the use of *pashat* in Numbers 20 is that Aaron is forcibly (and surreptitiously, it seems) removed from office, killed, and replaced. Korah and his fellow conspirators are obliterated because they dare to question the primacy of Aaron.

Joshua and Eleazar, then, lead the entry into the Promised Land while

Moses and Aaron are both denied access to the new Israelite home. The priesthood inaugurated at Sinai, however, persists under Eleazar, Aaron's elected heir, effectively his son. Those who reject this priesthood, the followers of the ancient Josephite tradition, are comparatively less significant in the biblical traditions to follow. Amalgamated in the general area of Samaria, these Israelites see themselves as *the* Remnant, the loyal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through Joseph, who worship a god untainted by the Egyptian pantheon.

It seems that Joshua takes the Remnant idea literally and devotes himself to the ideal of Joseph's pre-Egyptian religion (Josh 24:1–15), while the majority of the Israelites who head south to Jerusalem seem satisfied with the now familiar synthesis of beliefs.

Evidence for the schism at Sinai being based on differing religious beliefs and not just political squabbles, for instance, lies in the preservation of references to solar worship maintained in the southern kingdom: "He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord" (2 Kgs 23:11); "the bones of the kings of Judah ... shall be brought out of their tombs and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served" (Jer 8:1–2). Given all the disparaging remarks in the OT pertaining to the northern tribes, not one mentions solar worship. Even in the time of Ezekiel, the wrath of God is focused against *Judah* for permitting the abomination of sun worship in the temple (Ezek 8:16–17).

Joshua, in praying to God to make the sun and moon halt in their paths across the sky (Josh 10:12–14) provides a symbolic (and exploitative) show of divine supremacy, following the example of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh of course, but this time between the god of Abraham and the sun/moon-deities of the Amorites. "Put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord" (Josh 24:14); Joshua instructs the tribes who follow him to Shechem, where all contact with the religion of Moses and Aaron is severed. The concept of the Sinai covenant is nevertheless retained, reiterated, and re-codified for the people who see themselves as the true Remnant of Israel, the Samaritans.

The schism of the tribes is effectively finalized by the fact that although Joshua and Eleazar are both buried in the "hill country of Ephraim," Joshua is buried in Timnath-serah (which I will have cause to return to later) and Eleazar is buried in Gibeah, a town allotted to Benjamin. The north/south divide is also symbolically depicted in Num 26:63–5, where Caleb of Judah and Joshua of Joseph are reputed to be the only members of the Sinai enrolment to enter the Promised Land. As it is elsewhere recorded that Eleazar and Ithamar (at least) also enter the territory, what must be concluded is that the legend of Caleb and Joshua is intended as a

representation of the inevitable tribal division.

So, it is Joshua the Josephite, not Eleazar, who is hand-chosen by God to replace Moses. It is Joshua, the Ephraimite, who is granted an audience with the divine and the honour of leading his people into the land of their inheritance.

It is on this allegiance to the original religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, preserved through the Remnant of Joseph, that the Samaritans base their claim to primacy. The Taheb figure, their messiah, is said to live to 110 years old, the same age as both Joseph and Joshua when they died, supposedly. In symbolic numerology, this threefold repetition represents perfection, a neat, cyclical fulfilment: Joseph represents the patriarchs, Joshua the new beginning after the split from Egypt, and the *anticipated* Josephite, the Messiah ben Joseph, will be the culmination of the present world order and the beginning of the new priestly kingdom, which is just what the FG is all about. There will be a new schism, a new covenant in the North and, most importantly, an in-gathering of the faithful that will reverse the scattering of Israel and bring them to the true Promised Land.

*Judah became prominent ... and a ruler came from him,
yet the birthright belonged to Joseph.*

1 Chr 5:2

God sent me ... to preserve for you a remnant on earth ... Joseph.

Gen 45:5, 7

*It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be
gracious to the remnant of Joseph*

Amos 5:15

Messiah ben Joseph Tradition

Sometime *after* the events that founded the Christian faith, another messianic phenomenon arose, i.e., the complex Messiah ben Joseph tradition. The earliest reference to this specific tradition is in the third century CE Talmud (Succah 52a). This cites Zech 8:6 (which mentions the Remnant) and 12:10 (which mentions the “firstborn” and being “pierced through”). Later Midrash fragments refer to Gen 30:24, relating to Rachel who, on giving birth to Joseph, entreated God that she have another son; this is thought to be a prophecy concerning a future Josephite messiah. The Midrash also points to Deut 33:17, the blessing conferred upon Joseph that “majesty” will be his.

This is the main gist of the Messiah ben Joseph, or more specifically,

the Messiah ben Ephraim expectation (bear in mind it grew over the centuries from a few short sentences to quite a detailed description):

- ★ He would arise from the children of Joseph but would live in Jerusalem.
- ★ He would perform many signs while gathering the nation, a gathering which would start in Upper Galilee, though many of Israel would be scattered and unaware of his coming.
- ★ He would be responsible for the downfall of the procurator of the King of Edom.
- ★ His followers would rally around him but many would be killed in a conflict with occupying forces, otherwise known as Armilus (later referred to as the Antichrist).
- ★ He would be slain by Armilus but would later be revived by the Messiah ben David (after his body had been left in the streets for 40 days, with nothing unclean touching him).
- ★ He is referred to as Messiah, Son of God, Son of Joseph, King of Israel, Messenger of the Lord, and Comforter.
- ★ In some versions of the legend he is a suffering messiah, e.g., he is said to await his divine calling at the gates of Rome, winding and unwinding the bandages of the sick and poor. He is said to be wounded because of our transgressions.
- ★ In others, he is the military messiah anointed for battle, come to prepare Israel for the advent of the Davidic messiah.

Remember, these are ideas from Jewish, not Christian texts. What seems to have happened is that many, unconvinced *during* Jesus' active campaign, were soon so impressed by his uncanny timing and political impact (you will see what I mean), that they assumed he *must* have been a 'man of God' all along but they had missed the 'signs'. In fact, one document tries to justify this apparent messiah's death:

And when Messiah ben Joseph and all the people with him will dwell in Jerusalem, Armilus ... will go up and wage war against Israel, and will defeat Messiah ben Joseph and his people, and will kill many of them, and will capture others, and divide their booty And he will slay Messiah ben Joseph and it will be a great calamity for Israel.... Why will permission be granted to Armilus to slay Messiah ben Joseph? In order that the heart of those of Israel who have no faith should break, and so they will say: "This is the man for whom we

have hoped; now he came and was killed and no redemption is left for us” ... they will leave the covenant of Israel, and attach themselves to the nations, and the latter will kill them.

Hai Gaon, Responsum, Hai ben Sherira, 939–1038 CE

Several things to note here:

★ This passage seems to infer that the rise of the Christians was due to a schism after the Messiah ben Joseph was killed—those who lost faith in the covenant (the new Christians) left the motherland (Israel) and were ultimately persecuted. Does this not imply that ben Sherira equated Jesus with the Messiah ben Joseph?

★ The forces that kill the Messiah ben Joseph are said to kill many and take others captive, dividing the booty between them. The first half of this reference will have to await a later discussion but the latter suggestion echoes the dividing-up of Jesus’ garments at the crucifixion.

★ Perhaps the root of this legend stems from a fear that such a significant event had been catastrophically mistaken for just another ‘failed messianic contender’ leaving a wake of disruption and disappointment. In other words, some Jews later wondered if Jesus *was* a messiah, much like the one anticipated by John and the Essenes, and the prophecy was adapted to include other signs and portents, based on the history of the Jesus phenomenon, lest a future visitation be missed also.

★ The ‘procurator of the King of Edom’ is an intriguing reference. The royal Herodian family was of Edomite descent² and were seen to be if not puppets, certainly protégées of the Roman Senate. When all the various territories of Palestine came under Roman rule in 44 CE, they were redefined as the procuratorial province of Judaea. Before this date, rulers such as Pontius Pilate were called prefects, though Tacitus refers to Pilate as a procurator.³

² The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s brother. The tension between the two brothers (see Gen 27) forms the basis of a history of antagonism and confrontation between the Israelites and the Edomites but what was the original dispute about? It concerned the rights of the firstborn, one of the central themes of the FG. Some versions of the Messiah ben Joseph tradition stipulate that he will do battle against the sons of Esau (cf. Obad 1:18).

³ Pilate was a *praefectus civitatum*, appointed by the governor of a province to rule a part of it; he was of equestrian rank. Procurators were more involved with financial, taxation matters etc., while the prefects were military men in charge of the army, the construction of roads, etc.

★ We must not forget that a messianic hope based on a ‘son of Joseph’ is recorded in texts found at Qumran and we will have reason to consider this in more detail later.

Jesus, Son of Joseph

The name Jesus is the Hellenized form of Joshua (Yeshu/Yeshua) and although this seems a rather obvious thing to say, it does have quite a significant bearing on the overall understanding of the FG. The original Joshua, son of Nun, is of the Josephite house of Ephraim and becomes the right-hand-man and successor to Moses but his name is Hoshea initially, which means “salvation.” On the eve of the entry into Canaan, Moses gives Hoshea the commission name Joshua, which means “Yahweh is salvation.” The Hebrew verb, *yasha*, from which the name derives, actually means “to remove someone/thing from oppression, distress,” and this is *just* what Jesus, the new Joshua, intends to do.

Whether Jesus/Joshua *is* the real name of the chief character in the FG is impossible to say but it serves as a commission name in the narrative and is actually mentioned for the first time only *after* the meeting with John (below), which is, itself, depicted in light of the Joshua tradition. The Jews⁴ later say they know of his mother and father; this is not a claim to know them personally but a very direct indication that Jesus’ heritage is known. Jesus is explicitly called a “son of Joseph” (John 1:45, 6:42).

After the Babylonian exile, Israelite men often adopted for surnames the names of the patriarchs of the twelve tribes and once the Israelites returned to their homeland, there was an exerted effort to write down all the genealogies for posterity and for the division of properties, etc. Although the northern tribes were never really accepted into the fold down in Judaea, there were some of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the “sons of Joseph”) who lived in and around Jerusalem (1 Chr 9:1–3), so it may be that Jesus ultimately descends from one of these families. Genealogies, however, were kept active and were stored in the archives near the temple right up to the War in 70 CE, when the archives were destroyed.

Jesus is actually called a Samaritan to his face (John 8:48), yet Christian interpretation has handed this down to us as nothing more than a derogatory accusation, for the Samaritans are traditionally reviled by the

⁴ The term ‘Jews’ is not meant to disassociate the FG author from the Hebrew tradition, as some interpreters have claimed, but is a commonly made distinction between Samaritans and Jews, used even by the Samaritans themselves, Josephus, and other early historians, e.g., *Ant.* 13.3.4.

Jews.⁵ Individuals claiming descent from any of the so-called ‘lost’ tribes are almost non-existent in the Bible but one in particular stands out, i.e., Anna, the prophetess in Luke 2:36 who belongs to the tribe of Asher, and who heralds the coming of Jesus “to all those ... looking for the redemption of Israel.” Here we have a northern prophetess, quite distinctly described in terms of her heritage, claiming not that Jesus is the messiah but that those who wish to see Israel ‘redeemed’, i.e., in the sight of God, should pay attention.

“Joshua, son of Joseph” is hardly the most Davidic sounding name and there is no hint in the FG of Jesus having affiliations with the tribe of Judah.

Samaritan Perspective

There are a few things about the Samaritans that should be mentioned, though there is not much to tell, as little is known of their ancient history; although about two to three hundred, or so, still live at the base of Mount Gerizim, their religion and literature have been deeply influenced by Islam. Both the Samaritans and the Jews accuse the other of falsifying the scriptures to emphasize primacy, so getting to the core of the Samaritan mentality of Jesus’ day is difficult. We do know that their traditional language is Aramaic, written in the archaic Hebrew alphabet. Most pertinent, however, is that they see themselves as the *remnant of the true Israel* (which is supported by a reference in 2 Chr 34:9), calling themselves either Samaritans i.e., *keepers* (of the faith), or Hebrews, rather than Jews, hence the distinction so clearly demonstrated in the FG. Their influence is seen in some of the writings of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Samaritans are monotheistic and traditionally refer to their god as El, or Ela, though the more familiar (to us) Yahweh is also used. One aspect that distinguishes a Samaritan from a Jew, however, is the superstition about pronouncing the holy name; the Jews do not invoke the name, while the Samaritans do.

They are a religious community, governed by a high priest and they observe the festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles on Mount Gerizim, the mountain they claim to be the original site chosen by God to be his home. The mountain, according to Samaritan tradition, is the navel of the earth, an oasis in the wilderness; in the end days, rivers of “living waters” will pour out from it. It is the site, they claim, of Jacob’s vision of the ladder

⁵ According to Ezra 4:1–3, the northern tribes are considered adversaries and are prohibited to partake in the construction of the Temple; and in Neh 13:28 the Samaritan priests are considered an abomination to the priesthood of Jerusalem.

to heaven and the site of the sacrifice of Isaac. Beneath its summit, they assert, lies the Ark of the Covenant, buried in a cave, awaiting discovery at the time of the great reunion with God and the coming of the Taheb, or prophet-messiah. The Samaritan version of the Ten Commandments includes the divine order to build this sanctuary at Gerizim but given the rivalry between the northern and southern tribes, such a definitive annotation would seem almost inevitable.

In the FG, we see how Jesus exploits the various festivals to promote his own agenda, emphasizing those “of the Jews” and thereby suggesting he adheres to an alternative calendar. We also learn how he perceives the significance of the Samaritan heritage and what role Gerizim will or won’t play in the end days.

The Samaritans adhere only to the law of Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (HB), though they show an interest in other texts, especially the Book of Joshua, which tells of the original migration of Israelites into Samaria after the Sinai schism. Their claim of descent is from Joseph, through Ephraim and Manasseh, and they refer to themselves as the “sons of Joseph.” Jesus is not only called a Samaritan outright in the FG (which he does *not* refute), but the authorities also refer to him as a “son of Joseph,” which most interpreters don’t think to link to the Samaritan theme. The FG narrative also substantiates the link to Ephraim, though it is cleverly disguised!

Moses, to the Samaritans, is a unique human being, an exalted prophet who is, in essence, a representation of the light of God. As such, he is not truly of this world but has his origins in heaven, with God. He existed before the Creation, and was sent to earth in corporeal form to intercede on behalf of the righteous and deserving. Intercession on behalf of the just is also attributed to the ancestral saints in whom the “light of holiness” acts as a force of inspiration, or prophetic authority; it is handed down from one generation to the next, from Adam, through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, etc. A subtler theme, perhaps, this concept of a hereditary authority, or sanction, does prove integral to the story of Jesus’ mission as it unfolds.

The Samaritans also believe that there has been a time of favour and a time of wrath; they were in God’s favour for only about two-hundred and sixty years, and have been suffering his wrath ever since. They do anticipate a final judgement day, however, when rewards and punishments will be dealt out, and the Remnant will be reinstated. The righteous will wear fine garments and will smell of sweet perfume, while the wicked will be in rags and will stench, i.e., their fate is to be relegated to the devouring fire where Cain, the murderer, is said to dwell. The strongest allusion to this ideology, of course, comes in the FG scene where Martha visits the tomb of Lazarus and anticipates a “stench,” perhaps alluding to some sort of guilt attributed

to him.

I suggest that Jesus is, indeed, a true “son of Joseph,” i.e., a Samaritan. His genealogy, so often an issue of debate in the early Christian writings, is deemed suspicious because he is not of Judaeen birth, which makes him, automatically, an outsider, if not an enemy of the Judaeen clans in Jerusalem (and as such, not a Davidic messiah). He dares to confront and challenge the Judaeen authorities from the perspective of a disdained Samaritan, provoking ridicule and name-calling, evidence for which is found not only in the FG (John 8:48) but also in extra-biblical texts, where his Samaritan roots are used against him (see Appendices).⁶

It is worth noting how uncanny the Messiah ben Joseph tradition seems in retrospect, yet how little attention Christian scholarship has afforded it. With a new perspective, perhaps the mystery of Jesus’ non-Davidic, pro-Samaritan depiction in the FG can be better understood.

Remnant and Priesthood

Perhaps the most dramatic and obvious goal for Jesus, which is fairly widely accepted, is the denunciation of the Judaeen priestly cultus that dominates, indeed controls the Israelite nation via the temple, and of its associated rituals, rules, and traditions. Rather than breaking away from the faith of his forefathers to create what we now know to be Christianity, Jesus’ intention is to highlight the distinction between Jewish and Samaritan faith, a distinction that proves both crucial and provocative. That is not to say he wants to negate all that is Jewish and impose a purely Samaritan ideal; rather, he wants to demonstrate how the two factions must find common ground, if the children of Abraham are ever to find peace and know freedom again. This common ground is to be reached through Jesus, via the Remnant.

The entire mission Jesus embarks upon, according to the FG, is one that is rooted in the eventual reunion of the twelve tribes, the withdrawal from worship from both the temple at Jerusalem *and* the site on Mount Gerizim, and the return of the sanctified, pure priesthood, along with all the sacred accoutrements, *including the Ark*, to the last site of authentic, Josephite-led devotion, i.e., Shiloh.

Worshipping the “Father in spirit and truth” (Jesus’ comment to the Samaritan woman in John 4:23) is thus simply a rephrasing of Joshua’s order at Shechem to “revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness,” which is to be done by putting away the gods of the ancestors, destroying

⁶ The *Toledot Yeshu*, an alternative ‘history’ of Jesus (which I refer to again later) suggests the interest in Jesus’ genealogy is based on the Jewish claim that he was born of an adulteress who was menstruating.

the idols and altars, etc. (Josh 24:14). Only the tabernacle and the Ark are to be the physical foci/loci of worship.

The concept of the Remnant, as we have seen, has its foundation in the legend of the exodus and was originally predominantly a north/south division. Over time, however, the Remnant was scattered and disowned by the dominant Judeans. Followers of the original non-Egyptian, Abrahamic/Josephite faith, be they converts from among the Jews, Samaritans, or believers lost in the diaspora, these are Jesus' congregation, his flock. The priesthood he will inaugurate is thus not a means of usurping the authority of the temple in Jerusalem, nor does it initiate a new branch of Judaism, let alone a new religion. It is a means of reinstating the *old* religion, the faith of Abraham. Jesus' function as high priest, which becomes evident as the gospel progresses, does not rival that of the extant high priest, it *nullifies* it (symbolically).

This is powerful propaganda and the authorities in Jerusalem soon know precisely what Jesus is doing. It is a revolutionary approach supporting the underdog and offering the long-neglected Remnant a chance to become strong once again, if they unite. Jesus' plan to reinstate Shiloh with its own priestly dynasty is something the Jews in Judaea simply cannot tolerate. His Samaritan heritage is thus brought into the fore in their bid to discredit him and, ultimately, it is this association with Samaria that gets him arrested and crucified.

The Ark

Invoking such a sense of ancient patriotism and long-suppressed religious fervour would naturally spark more enthusiasm amongst the Samaritans than the Jews, for the gospel suggests Jesus *does* know where the Ark is. How else could he hope to return the seat of worship to Shiloh? This is, in part, why he gains such a following in the north: if he can return the Ark to its rightful site, the firstborn (Ephraim) will be reinstated and no longer subject to ridicule and humiliation (there is much more to be said on this, obviously).

There is a slight hitch, though. The Samaritans consider Shiloh somewhat suspect, as they believe the eventual loss of the Ark was the fault of the high priest Eli, who allowed the sacred object to be taken onto the battlefield, where it was seized by the Philistines. Suffering a terrible sickness soon thereafter and thereby believing the object to be cursed, the Philistines returned the Ark not to Shiloh but to Jerusalem, where it would later become ensconced in the temple. The northern tribes suffered further alienation and those who maintained that the true sacred site was Mount Gerizim were isolated. So, although Jesus is sympathetic to the Samaritans, he doesn't merely pander to their desire to see Judaea proven wrong—he

still has to prove to *them* that his vision of the new kingdom is worth fighting for. The conversion of many Samaritans is made simpler by virtue of the northern primacy issue but is not contingent upon Jesus' promising to acknowledge Gerizim as the home of the Ark and thus the divinely ordained kingdom. This is vital to understanding why certain repercussions occur and to locating references to Jesus' movement in certain extra-biblical texts. (We should also be aware of the fact that the term used to define the Ark of the Covenant, *arown*, is also used in Gen 50:26 to define the "coffin" [ossuary] in which Joseph's bones are interred and later buried. Perhaps this isn't such a coincidence.)

Kingship

The FG thus implies that Jesus fulfils the Genesis prophecy concerning the advent of a Josephite messiah, i.e., Gen 30:24 (where Rachel requests another son). A second prophecy, and one far more profound and specific, is fundamental to the theology of the FG: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, *until tribute comes to him* and the obedience of his people is his" (Gen 49:10). The English translation loses what is most significant about this short stanza. In fact, it makes it rather awkward, for it infers that Judah will lose the position as ruler when tribute is made to him; it doesn't make sense. In the Hebrew/Syriac versions, however, the phrase "until tribute comes to him" is rendered, remarkably, as "until *Shiloh* comes," "until he comes to *Shiloh*," or "until he comes to whom it belongs" (i.e., the ruler's sceptre). This *does* suggest a future fall of the ruler of Judah in some connection with the true ruler returning to Shiloh!

Later, when Ezekiel is commissioned to preach against the sanctuaries in Jerusalem, he warns that Judah will be destroyed, the "turban" and the "crown" removed "until he comes whose right it is" (Ezek 21:26–27); to this mysterious figure God will give the kingdom. The turban could be seen as the representation of the priesthood, and the crown of kingship, but in the FG the two concepts are interchangeable, for the priesthood Jesus envisions is also a kingly dynasty, as exemplified by Melchizedek (this will be discussed again).

In the FG, Jesus does not reject Nathanael's *tribute* to him as the "King of Israel," though he does reject other impositions and expectations of kingship elsewhere in the narrative. Blend this with the blessings of Jacob and Moses and you can begin to see where Jesus gets his ideas:

Joseph is a fruitful bough ... shot at ... and pressed ... hard ... by the
name of the shepherd ... by the God of your father, who will help you
... the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of

Joseph ... who was set apart from his brothers.

Gen 49:22–6

Blessed ... be his land, with the choice gifts of heaven above ... with the rich yield of the months ... and the favour of the one who dwells on Sinai. Let these come on the head of Joseph ... the prince among his brothers ... *firstborn* ... majesty is his!

Deut 33:13–17

Not only would a return to Shiloh act as a reinstatement of ancient Samaritan worship practices and thus qualify as the anticipated act of restoration, it would also give added meaning to Jesus' later declaration that "the ruler of this world has been condemned" (John 16:11). The ruler of the world Jesus speaks of is not the Roman Empire, nor Satan, as some would suggest but the corrupt seat of Judah, the usurper, the body of Israelites who travelled south from Sinai. The legitimate royal seat is at Shiloh (2 Kgs 15:13–14), so only a return to that site will fulfil prophecy and complete Jesus' mission.

It will be prudent to bear in mind throughout this analysis that the common translation of Shiloh is "peaceable or pacific" and "gift of God"; the symbolic numerical value given to the Hebrew letters forming the word Shiloh (i.e., its gematria) is equal to that given to the word "messiah."

2

THE MEETING NEAR QUMRAN

VERSES 1:1–18 OF THE FG constitute a Prologue which appears to be from a different hand, written some time after the events of the ensuing narrative; these shall be discussed at the end of the investigation. The FG ‘proper’ begins at 1:19, with the meeting of John and Jesus on the dry salt plains near Qumran.

John appears only briefly in the FG; he is said to *be* baptising which, in the Greek, means “to make overwhelmed; to wash, to immerse in water.” His presence, though, is essential not to the theological message (for any character, actually, could say what he says) but to the *historical* background of the FG narrative, which becomes evident only much later.¹ The Greek for John, *Ioannes*, is derived from the Hebrew, *Yehowchanan*, which means “Jehovah favours”; *chanan*, which generally means “to show favour,” stems from *chanah*, “to decline, grow to an end.” John is heard to say in John 3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

John “that was called the Baptist” appears in Josephus’ writings only once (*Ant.* 18.5.2); the passage should be treated with the same discretion as those concerning Jesus, for it is a little too convenient, yet it contains intriguing details that suggest an original, authentic core to the scenario. It interjects the story of the fall of Herod at such an opportune moment, i.e., between the introduction of Herodias and her illicit union with Herod, and Tiberius’ ordering of the head of Aretas, the King of Arabia. Josephus goes on to relate how, although Herod’s defeat in battle against Aretas was caused by the “treachery of some fugitives,” many Jews considered his downfall to

¹ An interesting PhD dissertation offers the following insight: “Jesus’ own praise of John as recorded in the Fourth Gospel is very grudging when compared with that given in the Synoptics ... So violent is the opposition of the fourth Evangelist to John that he will not even allow that he is Elijah” (Joseph Carter Swaim, 1931, *The Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel*, Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology University of Edinburgh, 132). I posit that there are *specific grounds* for the FG’s lack of overt support for John that really only make sense once the FG is re-examined.

be the result of his slaying of John.²

The account in *Antiquities* suggests that John had a remarkable hold over masses of people who would, seemingly, do just about anything for him, so where is this affirmed in the New Testament? Yes, he has followers but one doesn't get the impression his group is of any real threat to Herod, who, we are told, actively seeks John's death to avoid public mischief. In the FG, emissaries are sent from the authorities in Jerusalem to sound John out but is this really a precursor to his assassination? In Josephus' writing there is no explicit mention of John's alleged beheading, or the confrontation concerning Herod's new wife, suggesting either his unfamiliarity with the tradition on this matter, or that subsequent Christian writers inserted the account of the 'Baptist' at this point (which I think is more likely).

With the strengthening *modern* theory that John did have a connection to the Essenes, it seems strange that Josephus, having sampled life in the Essene community before choosing to become a Pharisee (*Life*, 2), never mentions this apparently awe-inspiring gentleman in any of his accounts of the Essenes, whom he praises consistently but rather, relegates him to a sub-story about Herod. This acts against the passage being genuine. So, too, the claim that some of the Jews considered Herod's downfall as divine justice for the slaying of John; after all Herod had done to build up such an ill reputation, the one thing this Romanized historian recounts so emphatically, in terms of retribution, is his involvement in the death of Jesus' predecessor? It is just too neat.

When John first makes himself heard, in John 1:23, he is declaring that he is the embodiment of the figure alluded to in Isa 40:3, i.e., "the voice crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" The context of Isaiah 40 is one of an anticipated deliverance from oppression and captivity for those who attend the 'word' of God and have patience in awaiting his support. The wilderness imagery is significant, representing not only a geographical setting but also the state in which the captives exist, i.e., in a spiritual wilderness. Recall that in Exod 17:1 the Israelites are said to wander in the Wilderness of Sin (Zin) for an entire generation, in a symbolic purging of one life and preparation for another; in Hosea (2:14) the vision of the restoration of Israel is in the context of a wilderness. For Jesus' own mission to have its foundation in the desert helps to signify what kind of mission it is and gives it the air of legitimacy it requires.

² In *Ant.* 18.7.2, Josephus suggests that God punished Herod for "giving ear to the vain discourses of a woman," i.e., Herodias. In other words, he was not a politic ruler. This sounds more like a rather obsequious Josephus, pandering to Roman sentiments!

Suffering Servant

The Jews send out emissaries (priests and Levites) to enquire about John's intentions. Already we get a sense of insecurity back in Jerusalem. Who is this man?

Although I have explained that there is an intentional distinction made between Jews and Samaritans, the FG takes this one step further. By "Jews" the FG often implies a certain *section* of the Jewish people, i.e., the leaders, the decision-makers, the priests, Levites, Pharisees, scribes. When it mentions others, it uses phrases like "the world" or "crowd." From this conglomerate of authority, and specifically the Pharisees, some priests and Levites are sent to discover what all the fuss is about out here in the desert.

Unable to comprehend why John is preaching redemption, if he is not one of the three agents of God promised to Israel (the Davidic messiah; Elijah, the prophet; or the prophet "from their own people" mentioned in Deut 18:18), they demand explanation, which John provides in a sort of code: "Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me" (John 1:26). In the precedent of Isa 40:3, the 'one' who comes after is the "suffering servant," the figure Christianity has identified with Jesus.

The "suffering servant" discussion is too lengthy and convoluted to present fully here but a few things do need mentioning. For instance, there are at least *two* servants mentioned in Isaiah, i.e., this one, who is seemingly portrayed both as Israel *and* as an individual, and an earlier one, Eliakim son of Hilkiah (Isa 22:20). Eliakim *is* associated with the house of David but the servant who first appears in Isa 41:8 is simply referred to as "the offspring of Abraham." What makes Isaiah's "servant" significant to John's declaration in the FG is the fact that he will:

come from the north³

(Jesus comes from Galilee/Samaria)

exist, in essence, from the beginning of time

("before Abraham I am")

be granted the divine spirit

("I saw the Spirit descending")

³ There is a serious ongoing debate concerning the north versus east direction for the coming of the "servant"; some scholars argue this character is the Persian King Cyrus, who is mentioned elsewhere as a servant (military tool) of God, but others claim the Hebrew text has to be adjusted to make the "east" designation work, as Cyrus advanced southward to Babylon, not westward.

be a “light to the nations”
(“I am the light of the world”)

make the blind see, and release prisoners
(blind man/Lazarus)

have his sins redeemed
(discussion on ‘purity’ in John 3)

glorify God
(his ‘works’ glorify the Father)

‘raise up’ the tribes of Jacob and bring them back to God
(‘raising’ of Lazarus / ‘gathering’ of the sheep)

be “lifted up and shall be very high”
(lifted up as King of Israel/ascending to the Father)

come from an unlikely place
(“can anything good come out of Nazareth?”)

be granted a “portion with the great”
(will be ‘glorified’)

These may seem to pertain to an individual but, especially once other information becomes apparent, each can also allude to the Remnant of Israel. In Isaiah 53, the passage in which Christianity is primarily interested, the ‘servant’ is compared to a young plant, a “root out of dry ground,” just as the Remnant is so envisioned elsewhere in the OT *and* in the FG. The servant, although despised and rejected, crushed by the iniquities of others and taken away by a perversion of justice, somehow rises to a new status (“Who could have imagined his future?”) because he “pours out himself to death.” This phrase actually implies that he “pours his *soul* out to death,” which seems to indicate a spiritual, rather than a physical death, for it is not clearly stated that the ‘servant’ *physically* dies.

The grave and tomb references pertain to the actions of the servant’s oppressors: “*they*” make his grave with the wicked, etc., and this apparently is the will of God *but* there is a twist: “When you make his life an offering for sin, *he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days*” (Isa 53:9). In other words, *the suffering servant survives!*

Making intercession for others, a significant aspect of the Samaritan saints and also Jesus, of course, can only be done by the righteous and the

Remnant *are* the righteous. Samaria, in the FG (as will become clear), is the rightful home of the Remnant and *it* has all the qualities of the ‘suffering servant’, for it, too, is (effectively) “cut off from the land of the living,” despised, and held “of no account.” The Remnant will, eventually, be “allotted a portion with the great” just as the individual ‘servant’ will receive his glorification.

The idea doesn’t end with Isaiah 53 but continues straight into 54, with the concept of the Bride of God and her return to glory, i.e., the subsequent major step in the FG narrative, also. So, although Christianity tends to focus on the suffering and (apparent but not fulfilled) death imagery, this multi-faceted personification of the devout Israel and each of these anticipated eventualities are paralleled in the FG.

What John is saying, then, is that someone from the north has been divinely chosen to re-establish the righteous as God’s elect—but John isn’t the one. Jesus “ranks ahead” of him because he is “before him.” The eternal “light of heaven” that is sent to imbue God’s chosen one is part of both the Samaritan belief system and the description of the servant.⁴

Bethany

John is said to be baptising in a place called Bethany, which means a “house of affliction.” This is the first example of the duality of names I mentioned earlier, for there are two Bethanys within the FG, i.e., this one (in John 1:28) and the one mentioned in 11:1 as the home of Lazarus. The subtle allusion to “affliction” is significant and intentional, making the name, potentially, a commission name invented for the FG narrative (and adopted for the subsequent Synoptics). In the first case, John’s declaration concerning the voice in the wilderness relates to Isaiah 40, where the “voice” heralds the advent of divine favour and the spiritual healing of the nation after the devastation of the exile; in the second, Bethany is the home of the man who is first said to be “sick” then “dead.” The former implies a “wilderness” setting, the latter a village near Jerusalem.

However, there is a somewhat confusing history concerning this name. The Christian theologian Origen (c.185–253 CE) argued that although the earliest manuscripts he had read did, indeed, say “Bethany,” no such site could be found “across the Jordon” in his day; there was a local legend pertaining to one called Bethabara, however, where John was said to have baptised. The debate continues but I suggest the name Bethany is a commissioned place name anticipating the symbolism that is yet to reveal

⁴ Moses is God’s ‘servant’ (Num 12:7), as is a prophet in the general sense, e.g., Amos 3:7.

itself in the gospel—and this is directly linked to Lazarus, so the duality within the narrative will prove deliberate, even if the geographical site bore an alternative name.

There is a Beth-barah in Judg 7:24, for instance, where Gideon is fighting the Midianites in Lower Galilee; he sends messengers down to the Ephraimites to “seize the waters” against the enemy as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan, the south-east boundary of their territory, near the tip of the Dead Sea. This is corroborated by a place called Beth-arabah, in Josh 15:61 and 18:18, which is listed as being close to the “City of Salt.” At the junction of the River Jordan and the tip of the Dead Sea lies a large, sterile salt flat, i.e., a true wilderness.

On the other side of the River Jordan (where John is) is the Abarim range (the Beyond Mountains) i.e., the end of the Wilderness of Sin (Zin) and the end of the exodus, at least for Moses. One can see the famous Mount Nebo from the salt flats. He is told by God to climb to the top of this range so that he can see the Promised Land, after which he will die. Before dying, however, Moses is to commission someone to lead the people (Exod 27:17); he is to “lay his hand” on the man “in whom is the spirit” and thus give him authority. This someone is Joshua, son of Nun. This is precisely what *seems* to happen to Jesus, our Joshua, son of Joseph, i.e., there is a definitive recognition and transference of authority. So, Bethany, aka Bethabara, is a perfect setting to open the narrative of the FG, where Jesus receives his divine commission in the same land his predecessor took his commission from Moses.

An intriguing, almost imperceptible reference to this area comes in Ezek 39:11; Ezekiel is told by God that when Israel is restored and the old age has come to an end, the oppressors and invaders of Israel (under the name Gog) will be destroyed, and that the Israelites will have to search for their bodies for seven months, cleansing the land of its defilement. The place where all these bodies will be buried is called the Valley of the Travellers or, ‘Valley of the Abarim’, east of the sea. Thus, the site of Abarim becomes the “sign” (39:15) of Israel’s victory over its oppressors—a powerful political concept that Jesus is all too aware of.

As well as on Isaiah however, John’s response to his visitors is founded on Jer 17:5–6, where it is stated that those who put their faith in ‘mortal’ leaders are led into a wilderness and will be unable to “see when relief comes.” The representatives of the temple institution have been led into a wilderness that is both physical (they have been ‘sent’ into it) and metaphorical (the spiritual wilderness created by ineffectual and illegitimate leaders); they can’t even see that relief is needed, let alone who will bring it! Among them stands one they do not know, they don’t recognise: what can this mean, on a practical level?

Jesus doesn't actually appear at Bethany until the next day; he is in the vicinity of Jerusalem. This is why he is said to be 'amongst' them, i.e., the priests and Levites, not physically, right then and there but *dwelling* amongst them; he is the one they 'do not know' (do not *recognise*) because he is a Josephite. (Remember, according to the post-Jesus Messiah ben Joseph tradition, the chosen one would be a Josephite, living in Jerusalem). A Josephite cannot be a priest of the temple, yet in John's strange statement, there is the insinuation that *he* recognises Jesus as a priest and it is to *this* the confirmation in John 3 relates (discussed later).

What we also need to be aware of is the fact that in the FG Jesus *does not* receive any form of baptism *from* John. Look at the sequence of events in the scene: John is questioned, he sees Jesus coming and declares him the "lamb of God"; he testifies that he saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus, and that he was told by "the one who sent" him to baptise that this conferring of the Spirit would be the sign of the one who would be "revealed to Israel." Thus, John is apparently *not* intimately familiar with Jesus (which forces us to question the familial relationship that is traditionally accepted, i.e., as cousins), and there is *no* intimate baptismal scene between Jesus and John.

Who is "the one who sent" John to "baptise"? If John is a leading figure at Qumran, who would have the authority to order him to the other side of the Jordon to perform this rite? Does he mean God told him? Why not say that, for authority; why be evasive? Retaining the cultural context of the scene, however, the act of 'baptising with water', rendered using the Greek verb *baptizō*, actually implies a very Jewish spiritual-purification ritual, i.e., the ceremonial dipping of the body in the mikvah. Mikvot (plural) are most efficacious when the waters are naturally flowing (called "living waters" in the Mishnah [Mik. 1:1–8]), hence the Jordan River is the best mikvah (this anticipates the FG's scene with the "blind man" in John 9). As the investigation proceeds, it becomes evident that it may be Jesus himself who instigates this meeting with John; he proves to have 'friends in high places' who are able to pull strings in the background.

Twice, John declares that he does not "know" Jesus, and with the added statement that the emissaries do not know him, this is a threefold (here, negative) declaration, a motif that permeates the FG and one that will come to influence the reader's understanding of the relationship between Jesus and John.

One of the most familiar connections between Jesus and Isaiah's servant is John's designation of Jesus as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" and Isaiah's servant being "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" who bears "the sin of many" (Isa 53:7, 12). In both instances, "sin" is singular and refers to a communal state; it is not, as some assume, the sins of each of us against one another but the sin of the *nation* against

God. It is the sin of illicit worship, of pride, of deception, in full knowledge of the divine Law.

Jesus' identification with the 'lamb' has two potential implications. One is fairly conventional, suggesting a connection to the Passover animal because Jesus is crucified at this time of year, which would make John's speech a true prophecy. John, however, is not a prophet; he is a priest who preaches *concerning* prophecy. Also, the original wording for the Passover animal in Exod 12:5 (LXX) is *probaton* (sheep), not *amnos* (lamb), as in the FG. Some scholars, regardless, take this passage to imply that John must be baptising in April, around the time of the Passover. I don't think this is justifiable and will provide further argument, in due course.

John's words simply mean: "This is the man who will redeem Israel." The 'lamb' reference, along with John's own claim to being the one who heralds the servant, identifies Jesus as the embodiment of this mysterious character from Isaiah, the suffering servant. The 'lamb to slaughter' imagery in Isaiah 53, recall, culminates in the *survival* and elevation of the servant, *not* in him being sacrificed; the simile is used by Isaiah to describe the "silence" of the servant during his ordeal (just as Jesus remains silent when being interrogated by Pilate). The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* states that in Isaiah 53, the term is not intended as a "sin-offering" (as per the NRSV) but as a self-offering of the servant "in compensation for the sins of the people, interposing for them as their substitute." It is not the same thing. We will see this reflected in the Jesus-Barabbas scenario, later.

The Passover sacrifice does not expiate sins. It is a commemoration of *redemption* from spiritual slavery, as the first event had been, back in Egypt, where the blood of the animal was brushed over the doors of the Israelites to protect them from death. Only in *this* context would the Passover lamb concept make sense and this *does* have an unusual bearing on Jesus' arrest and crucifixion but this *isn't* what John says (see "Temple Business" in Chapter 18).

An offering specifically to ameliorate sin/guilt is never stipulated as being a male lamb. If the congregation or the anointed priest sins, the sacrifice must be a bull; for everyone else a *female* sheep or goat, or two birds (if the people are poor), according to Leviticus 4. The beast that actually 'takes away' the sin of the nation is an adult male *goat* which, on the Day of Atonement, is released into the desert after the high priest has laid his hands upon it, transferring the guilt of the congregation—a *second goat is offered up as a sacrifice* (Lev 16). It is in this context that the allusion to Jesus' *expiation* of sins will be found and in this context the crucifixion scene will reveal its most dramatic secret.

Son of God

Very generally speaking, the Qumran community anticipate a messiah of Aaron, a high-priestly messiah, as well as a lay, or temporal messiah of Israel but in some of the DSS texts the description seems to combine the two, making it appear that they expect one messiah, who is both priestly *and* ‘of Israel’ (i.e., of the northern tribes).

The sign of Jesus’ commission comes down from heaven like a dove (John 1:32) but a metaphorical dove, for such is the traditional symbol of God’s beloved, Israel (e.g., Isa 60:8; Hos 11:11; Ps 74:19, and 2 Esd 5:26). According to Exod 4:22–3 and Hos 11:1, Israel is God’s symbolic ‘son’, his legal representative on earth (i.e., not meant as “offspring”); by associating Jesus with the symbol of the dove coming to rest upon him, the implication is made that Jesus is God’s chosen representative, his authorized agent. Both Joseph and Ephraim were hand-chosen by God to become the symbolic *firstborn*. The dove, the ‘spirit’ of God, is simply a metaphor for the laying of the hand on the head in a ritualistic election, e.g., “Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim” (Gen 48:14).

A son, according to the apocryphal Sir 30:4–6, is a continuation or reflection of the father; he is a living memory of a father who dies, or is absent; he takes on the role of avenger and benefactor in his father’s absence. As the representative son of God, Jesus becomes the authority *within* Israel, amongst the “children of God” (Deut 14:1). As Solomon is supposedly chosen by God to be his son for the sole purpose building the temple (1 Chr 28:6), so Jesus is made a son by virtue of his (perceived) divine authority to raise up a purified priesthood and re-establish worship in the true house of God. This won’t be the last time such a parallel is drawn between Jesus and Solomon. This is the moment of recognition of the divine ‘spirit’ that imbues Jesus with the authority he will claim in the subsequent narrative; following in the footsteps of Moses and Joshua, Jesus is seen as receiving the “light of heaven.”

More germane to the Jews’ perception of Jesus is the use of “son of God” to imply kingly descent, as prescribed in 2 Sam 7:14. This will crop up again during the discussion of Jesus’ arrest.

Unnamed Initiate

Perhaps the most intriguing of the initial characters of the FG is the unnamed companion of Andrew. All we learn of him is that he is initially a disciple of John (John 1:35). Even his apparent claim to recognise Jesus as an authoritative figure (by calling him “Rabbi” in 1:38) is somewhat of a red herring for he speaks in unison with his companion, concealed in the anonymity. The only other instance of one disciple appearing in close

connection with another, while remaining so explicitly incognito, is in John 18:15, where it is implied that this shadowy character is actually known to the high priest. In 20:2 however, another unnamed disciple is verified as the “one whom Jesus loved,” purposefully distinguishing him from the character in John 1 and 18.

A very common symbolic technique, be it literary or visual, is to represent ignorance, evil, or the potential for either, by referring to darkness, furtiveness, mystery, etc. The elusive trial of Jesus in John 18:3f is held at night; Josephus tells of Pilate’s desecration of the temple occurring during the dark hours (*Ant.* 8.3.1); under the cover of darkness come murderers and thieves (Job 24:14); and it is a general maxim that one must be on one’s guard for trouble at night (Ps 119:148). The FG author intends for his readers to be on their guard with respect to this mysterious figure, whose nature is so obviously concealed, first by the lack of a name, then by the ambiguous recognition of Jesus, and finally by the nocturnal events of John 18. His identity becomes evident later in the FG narrative but, like Jesus, we are not supposed to recognise him yet.

Andrew

Along with the unnamed disciple comes Andrew, of whom also very little is related, other than that he is the “brother” of Peter, and that he, along with Peter and Philip, is from the town of Bethsaida. Andrew and the unnamed man are directed by John to go to Jesus and the two remain with their new leader for a day of enlightenment. Andrew, it should be noted, introduces Peter to the group and it is with Peter that the unnamed disciple is connected in John 18:15. In effect, Andrew acts as a mediator, a general assistant or messenger in the narrative, i.e., he introduces Peter, he raises the question of Jesus’ identity (1:41), he is the disciple through whom the feeding in John 6 is finally initiated, and in 12:22 he is the one Philip approaches with the request to introduce the Greeks to Jesus.

A subtle pattern arises when we compare the fate of Jesus’ associates who have singular Greek names, with those who bear more traditional Hebrew names: the former tend to fade out of the narrative, the latter prove to be highly significant. “Andrew” is a Greek name (meaning “virile, manly”) and, like Philip’s, his is a very mundane nature. The theological complexity of Jesus’ mission proves to be too much for this disciple and he gradually disappears from the main plot of the narrative, though he serves his purpose.

Jesus’ disciples, most interpreters agree, represent the twelve tribes of Israel, so each *should* provide us with a clue as to which tribe he represents. I’m not implying that each individual’s genealogy is traced to confirm

heritage before Jesus takes them on (though this is a possibility). It is a symbolic gesture that helps to create the *impression* of the high priest, who wears the symbols of the twelve tribes upon his chest, in the form of twelve stones. This representation can take the form of ideology, traits, or actions.

The Greek name Andrew does, ultimately, derive from the Hebrew term, *'aner* (meaning “young man”) and there are only two precedents for this name in the OT. The only person named Aner is an Amorite, one of three brothers who are allies to Abraham; this is fitting (if we substitute Jesus for Abraham, which is actually hinted at later in the gospel, and Andrew, Peter, and the unnamed disciple as the three ‘brothers’).

The other Aner is a place, mentioned in 1 Chr 6:70: though originally within the land allotted to the half-tribe of Manasseh, it is actually given to the Kohathites, who are of the tribe of Levi. Andrew, then, may be affiliated with the tribe of Levi and although this seems an arbitrary interpretation of his name, it proves to have further support in the symbolic representation of the *other* characters, as we shall see.

Together, then, Jesus, the unnamed disciple, and Andrew effectively echo the situation at Sinai, with Eleazar, Joshua, and Caleb as their parallel characters in the OT. Eleazar and Andrew are Levites, Caleb and the unnamed disciple are of the tribe of Judah (which can only be explained later, so bear with me for a while), and Joshua and Jesus are Josephites.

Combined with the *site* of John’s baptising, we get a clear allusion to the end of the exodus and the imminent entry into a new Promised Land.

Peter

The third disciple to be introduced in John 1 is Simon Peter. He has both Greek and Hebrew names, so his fate is more complicated. He is brought to Jesus, quite without ceremony, by his brother Andrew. “Brother,” though, may mean blood-relative, something analogous to ‘kin’, or simply that the two men are from the same town. Elsewhere in the NT, “brothers” is used to indicate fellow believers. The point is, Simon Peter is to be affiliated with *Andrew* in some way, rather than with Philip.

“Simon” derives from the Hebrew name Simeon, the *second* son of Jacob, i.e., *not the firstborn*. He is the brother of Levi (represented by Andrew). Simeon is rebellious and impressionable (Gen 34:25–30) and his descendants become strongly associated with the tribe of Judah (Judg 1:3), eventually becoming the weakest of all the tribes and *this will become a significant factor in the FG story, so it is worth remembering*. Peter and Andrew are ‘brothers’ I submit, by virtue of their mutual priestly profession, as mentioned in the discussion on Bethsaida, below. “Simon” also stems from the Hebrew word *shama*, meaning “to hear attentively” that is, to

understand, obey, etc., and this, too, becomes a major factor of Peter's subsequent depiction.

This disciple, in fact, has *four* names, i.e., Simon, Peter, Cephas, and in the NRSV translation, "son of John." "You are Simon the son of John. You are to be called Cephas," Jesus states, in the only direct and explicit renaming in the FG (John 1:42), confirming the use of commission names in the gospel. Although "Peter" is, in Greek, *Petros*, and *can* be translated to mean "rock" as in bedrock (a classic interpretation based upon the supposed primacy of Matt 16:18, where Jesus claims that Peter is the rock upon which the Church will be built), this cannot be said of Cephas. The FG makes a vital distinction.

The word *kephas* (*keph*) is Aramaic and means "a hollow rock." This in turn stems from *kaphaph*, "to curve, bow down." In several OT uses of the *keph/kaphaph* terms what is represented is the humbling action of prostrating oneself before, or 'bowing down to' another, sometimes physically, but usually metaphorically. In the context of Isa 58:5, for instance, it is claimed that outward signs of faith, humbling oneself publicly by bowing down, etc., mean little if, inwardly, one is not sincere; and in Mic 6:6, it is stated that arrogance and ignorance preclude intimacy with God. The term thus implies humility, a humility that must come from complete subjugation and repentance. A strange name to bestow on the supposed leader of the Church, wouldn't you say? There's more.

The FG doesn't *actually* call Peter the "son of John"; in the original Greek, it calls him the "son of Jonah," which makes a profound difference to our understanding of the man. The OT precedent for Jonah is from the book of the same name and as the son must reflect his father (he inherits traits, fulfils expectations, perpetuates identity, just as Jesus does, as the "son of Joseph"), Peter must reflect Jonah in some way.⁵

Jonah is a proud, arrogant man, who initially defies the will of God; he is cast into the belly of the leviathan in order to subdue him, to *impose humility* upon him, so that the intended mission can be carried out (i.e., the conversion of the Ninevites). In this state of bondage Jonah prays to God for deliverance, thus reiterating the need for true repentance in anticipation of freedom from one's own personal prison. Humbled and penitent, Jonah is delivered and he accepts his commission to be a missionary to Nineveh. Jonah, however, rejects the will (i.e., word) of God three times (Jonah 1:2–3; 4:1; 4:9–11); so too will Peter thrice reject Jesus and the word, or will, of God (John 13:38). Like Jonah, Peter must be humbled.

⁵ Some scholars compare the vision of Peter in Acts 11:1–18 and its ultimate effect on the transformation of Peter's attitude to the inclusion of 'outsiders' into the divine plan to the similar general concept of the Jonah narrative.

Thus, we see the importance of retaining the Greek text of John 1:42. The only other gospel to use “son of Jonah” with respect to Peter is Matthew (16:17), where the common Jewish way of naming is used, i.e., Simon Bar-Jonah. What is interesting about this is the fact that in Matt 12:38f Jesus warns that the “sign of Jonah” will be the only sign Jesus will show the Pharisees, i.e., the *necessary* rejection of arrogance and pride. What does the “sign of Jonah” mean to the Pharisees (or to anyone, for that matter)? The answer: “Change your ways, or else!”

Peter’s renaming echoes that of Abraham (Gen 17:5) and Jacob (Gen 35:10), in that the name is confirmed by the ‘voice’ of God; Jesus acts as God’s representative in this, the only verbal renaming in the FG. Where both Abraham and Jacob were ideals of unadulterated Israelite piety, however, Peter now represents the Israel of Jesus’ day; proud, self-assured, and in danger of losing sight of God in the glare of its own arrogance. This is the ‘world’ Jesus must overcome if he is to inaugurate the new kingdom.

With this allusion to the humbling of the spirit in order to fully accept the will of God, Peter is the one who *must* “hear attentively” and he is the one who *must* “obey.” As the “son of Jonah,” he is identified as one who is rebellious and obstinate, and as Cephas he is destined to be disciplined.

*[P]repare the way, Remove every obstruction
from my people’s way.
Isa 57:14*

Philip

The Greek for “Philip” is *Philippos*, with the prefix *Phil-* meaning “a lover of” and *-ippos* meaning “horse,” i.e., “a lover of horses.” The first part of the name, *Phil-*, is significant because it surfaces again, in the form of *phileo*, in connection with two other disciples, i.e., Lazarus and Peter.

Philip is from Bethsaida, a village expanded upon by Philip, the brother of Herod Antipas, in whose tetrarchy it lies. It thus has to be on the eastern side of the Jordan. The most popular position for scholars is on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee (note that this is very close to “Bethany/Bethabara”) supposedly because there is a thriving fishing centre there (hence, the name translates as “house of fish”) but one has to wonder if this is not a post-Jesus attribution, especially when just at this location, at the juncture of the Little Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, is the ancient town of Ain (Num 34:11); some scholars suggest that Ain became the city of Bethsaida sometime later in its history. I suggest the significance lies in “the house of fish” idea, which links directly to Jesus (discussed later). In Josh 19:7, however, there is another Ain, said to be in the land allotted to Judah

but it is given over to the Simeons. It then becomes a Levitical town provided for the Kohathites, the descendants of Aaron's branch of the Levite tribe, as a specifically priestly town (Josh 21:16).

This is interesting. There are two Ains mentioned in the OT; one seems to be in the north, the other in the south. The FG author *exploits* this traditional ambiguity to serve his own purpose, reiterating the schism of north and south, of Judah and Joseph, of Judaea and Samaria. Andrew emulates the Kohathites (Levites), Peter the Simeons; both are linked in a way that suggests a hereditary affiliation (i.e., "brothers") and both are connected (symbolically) with the priestly aspect of the town.

Philip is the only disciple in John 1 who is sought out and chosen by Jesus; he is "found." This may suggest that Jesus is looking for a protégée of some sort, a second-in-command perhaps, or at least a *special* disciple (and this is supported by subsequent events). Perhaps Jesus knows Philip already; it may be that Philip is actually Jesus' own relative, considering the high expectations, the profound disappointment but continued affection for this character that the FG depicts (which will be revealed in due course). I am willing to bet this is the case; in fact, I shall propose that Philip is Jesus' son. There is no concrete evidence to support this assertion but when you see the patterns I have been seeing for the last thirty years, the familial intimacy becomes obvious. It is my opinion that Philip, the only male disciple to a) earn the bestowal of the special *phileo* word for "love," b) be tested for his suitability for the role of Jesus' right-hand man, and c) be retained within the inner circle right to the end, despite being unsuccessful (to be discussed), is Jesus' initial choice for the heir to the kingdom. *Philip is the firstborn.*

Philip is also the only disciple (except for Peter, in the epilogue of John 21) to whom Jesus directly says, "Follow me." He is the one who finds Nathanael (echoing his own experience of being sought and found), and it is he who declares that the one "about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote," Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth has been found. This distinction is paramount to the understanding of the FG throughout: Andrew, Peter, and the unnamed disciple all refer to Jesus as "the messiah," to which there is no response on Jesus' part; Philip declares *exactly* what Jesus *wants* him to declare. It is almost as if he has been coached to say this. The phrase actually gives us much of what we need to unlock the gospel, i.e., the Torah, the Prophets, the Samaritan/Josephite connection, and the role Jesus is to play. *However...*

The horse, according to Ps 32:9, is "without understanding," and in Ps 33:17 (and Ps 147:10; Hos 1:7 and 14:3) the horse is associated with the idea of battle against an enemy. God, it is implied, will save Israel *not* by "war, or by horses, or by horsemen" (Hos 1:7); Israel "will not ride upon

horses.” Philip, associated with the “lovers of horses,” both lacks understanding (as we shall see) and is affiliated with the Greeks (see John 12:20f), who also revere the horse as a weapon of war.

For all intents and purposes, then, Philip comes to represent the Israelites who have undergone too profound a change under the Hellenistic influence to revert back to the old way of thinking. The fact that Jesus has to seek him out (I’ll come back to this later), only to find he is not cut from the same cloth, reveals a distinct *lack* of divine foresight, also apparent in the (previous) acceptance of the dubious unnamed disciple. This works to depict a very human, fallible Jesus, as the mistake costs him valuable time, forcing him to prolong his stay in the ‘world’ (amongst the general population) and to rethink his strategy.

Nathanael

Nathanael means “Given of God” (*nathan*, “to give” plus *el*, meaning “god”); it is a Hebrew name. It is Nathanael who is at the centre of John 1:45–51, *not* Jesus; it is Nathanael who questions *Jesus’* significance, reacting to the idea of something ‘good’ coming from Nazareth with dismay (1:46). Jesus responds by making what some Christian interpreters understand to be a clairvoyant declaration; he claims that he has already seen Nathanael “under the fig tree,” before he is called by Philip.

The fig tree in the OT has several interconnected meanings. It describes the ideal of God’s protection and mercy (e.g., Jer 24:1–8 and Dan 4:10), the ideal nation (e.g., Joel 1:7, 12), and conveys the idea of peace, prosperity, and unity (1 Kgs 4:25; 1 Macc 14:11–12, etc.). The most profound instance of this theme, as far as the FG is concerned, is that expressed in Zech 3:10, where God promises that *on the day when the old priesthood is cleansed of its iniquities and the new high priest crowned*, each man shall invite his neighbour under his “vine and fig tree,” presumably as a sign of harmony and unity. By seeing Nathanael under the fig tree, Jesus is simply assuring him that this ideal time will come, soon.

The imagery of John 1:51 draws on Jacob’s vision of the ladder between heaven and earth, upon which the ‘angels’ are seen ascending and descending (Gen 28:10–17). In this precedent, God declares that he is the god of Abraham and Isaac, he promises prosperity for Jacob’s descendants and he confirms the promise of a return of the land to its rightful inheritors, i.e., Jacob and his offspring. God claims that he will be with Jacob and will ‘keep’ him wherever he goes until the promise is fulfilled. Jacob responds to this dream by pronouncing that God has become manifest at the site and that it truly is the “the gate of heaven.” He seems surprised at his own ignorance of the sanctity of the place (Bethel, in what is later Samaria).

Comparing this to the FG, the similarities become clear: Nathanael is promised a vision paralleling Jacob's; he reflects Jacob's astonishment and subsequent conviction; after his encounter he reacts in a respectful and devout manner; and his exclamation, "you are the Son of God," echoes Jacob's affirmation of God's presence (in this case, through Jesus).

Jesus is acting as God's representative, his son, purposefully reflecting his father, the divine King of Israel who stood beside Jacob and promised him an ideal future and a helping hand in the meantime. Nathanael recognises Jesus' authority and exclaims his faith in Jesus' word; unlike the emissaries from the Pharisees, he 'sees', he understands.

The word for "you" in John 1:51 is plural, suggesting a representative depiction of Nathanael, but a representation of what? Why, too, does his initial impression of Nathanael cause Jesus to remark on his lack of "deceit" (1:47)?

The link between Jacob, whose subsequent commission name is Israel (Gen 35:10) and Nathanael, whose name infers those given to Jesus by God, e.g., to re-establish as the foundation of the *new* Israel, is provocative and hardly coincidental. Both incorporate the early 'El' designation ("god") and, recall, this is something rooted quite firmly in the Samaritan religion. What makes Jesus' connection to Nathanael most profound (and this will have a bearing on Jesus' crucifixion) is Nathanael's declaration that Jesus is the King of Israel. This will be the *only* affirmation of kingship Jesus acknowledges.

The lack of deceit becomes significant because the only Israelites that are not deceitful, according to the scriptures, are those chosen, the elect, i.e., the Remnant. Nathanael, therefore, represents the Remnant of the ideal Israel, the descendants of Abraham and Jacob who were not tainted by the Egyptian influence. It seems fair to ascribe to Nathanael the role of "true Israelite." Jesus hints at this again in John 17:6–8, when he says:

I have made your name known to *those whom you gave me* from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word ... the words that you gave to me I have given to them and they ... know in truth that I came from you; and they shall have believed that you sent me.

"Those whom you gave me" alludes to the Remnant (those who have kept God's word), and is also the meaning of the name Nathanael.

Jesus' enthusiastic reception of Nathanael has a precedent in the suffering servant passages of Isaiah 53, where the Remnant is described as having "no deceit in his mouth." It also has a precedent in Ps 32:2: "Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." The original context of this psalm is one of deliverance and the

promise of instruction of a new ‘way’ for those who will humble themselves and admit their sins. The “Lord imputes no iniquity” to the Remnant for in it (in Nathanael) there is no deceit. Everyone else has to earn his or her redemption.

Nathanael, with his Hebrew name, is there, at the end of the gospel.

*Blessed are the solitary and the elect,
for you will find the Kingdom.
For you are from it, and to it you will return.*
Gos Thom 49

Nazareth

Why is Nathanael surprised that anything good can come from Nazareth?

The name Nazareth is not attested in the OT, the Talmud, Midrash, or Josephus, and the current estimated location, about four or five miles south-east of Sepphoris, is based on a second-century reference cited in a fourth-century historical account (Eusebius), making it, to say the least, fallible. In Matt 2:23, Jesus’ association with this northern town is rationalized by claiming that it is a fulfilment of some obscure prophecy, which scholars insist must refer to the Davidic messiah mentioned figuratively in Isa 11:1 through a play on the word *neser*: “A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse.” What few interpreters mention is that there is *another* use of the word in the OT, in Isa 49:6, where the “suffering servant” is described as *the one who will restore the Remnant of Israel*, the tribes of Jacob (in the NRSV the word *nesurim* is translated as “survivors”). If Jesus is to be identified with the servant, he must also be the restorer of the “survivors,” the Remnant.

To make matters even more intriguing, in Deut 29:28 there is a word that is translated as “another land,” a mysterious place beyond the Euphrates (metaphorically, out of sight). Moses has been warning about the tribes’ necessary devotion to the *one* god and about the curses that will be invoked if the Israelites allow the other gods of Canaan to lure them away. He tells them that in future days, when people ask where all the people have disappeared to, the legend will be that God “cast them into *another land*” because of their deviant ways. Then Moses adds: “The secret things belong to the Lord” (Deut 29:29), inferring that this place is not so much a geographical site, as a metaphor for limbo, with the scattering a direct punishment. This secret, mysterious place, “another land,” is Arzaeth.⁶ I suggest *this* is the theological basis for Nazareth. It is no wonder Nathanael

⁶ Josephus mentions it, also (*Ant.* 11.5.2). In the Talmud, the realm is interpreted as the ‘world to come’ and the *ten* tribes are only allowed to have a share in this new world if they repent.

doubts that anything good can come from there, yet there is optimism in Jesus' message to Nathanael that overrides the negative implication of Arzareth and hints at the re-gathering and future prosperity after a return to God, which is the FG's message throughout.

This strange realm is also mentioned in 2 Esdras. Ezra is granted an interpretation of one of his visions—a man coming down from a mountain, who gathers a multitude before the end days. The man, Ezra is told, is God's son, and the 'peaceable' multitude represents the scattered nine tribes who have *chosen* to disassociate themselves from the rest of the world in order to live according to the statutes of their own religion. The place to which they, the Remnant, journeyed, Ezra is told, is Arzareth (2 Esd 13:45).⁷

So, is Nazareth simply a play on Arzareth?

I really think this is the most fitting explanation of Jesus' mysterious origins, an explanation of how the Jews can both "know his mother and father" (John 6:42) and yet "not know where he is from" (9:29). If Nazareth was listed as his birthplace, why the mystery? Perhaps there was no such town and the obscurity is mentioned solely for the purpose of identifying the Remnant from the Jews, the sheep from the goats, i.e., the Jews who cannot 'see' cannot follow Jesus.

The FG isn't really interested in Jesus' birth, as nothing is mentioned of it, other than this remark telling us that the authorities have checked his genealogy. As was the case with the original Josephite families that returned to Jerusalem after the exile, Jesus' birth would have been a matter of record but as a Samaritan, his genealogical record would have proven (politically) insignificant to the authorities. They may know his bloodline, which is why they taunt him with the supposedly derogatory "you are a Samaritan" (John 8:48) but he is a stranger to them.

In the FG, Jesus sees himself as having been chosen to *represent* the people of Arzareth, those scattered Israelites who fled in order to protect their true identity and beliefs, and so he associates himself with them (as their spiritual "shepherd"). This is precisely how the connection between Salathiel and his mission is made, in 2 Esdras: "... do you not know that Israel has been entrusted to you in the land of their exile?" (5:17). Thus, perhaps, Jesus is not born in a town called Nazareth, rather, he is from this representative group, i.e., he is one with and of the Remnant.

According to a fourth-century inscription at Caesarea found in 1962, Nazareth is listed as one of the villages in which priestly divisions took up

⁷ This is a more optimistic concept of the place, where the northern tribes make it a conscious decision to detach themselves. This sounds more like the version in the Book of Joshua, where there is a concerted effort to detach from an Egyptian heritage.

residence after the War in 70 CE. One wonders why such a place name was chosen, if it had such potentially negative connotations, especially in terms of a non-Jewish priestly pretender a generation earlier. Is this evidence of the post-Jesus Messiah ben Joseph idea that many had failed to recognise his role until it was too late—was this town so named after its significance in the FG was comprehended?

What of the Synoptic version of Jesus' birthplace, Bethlehem? This is assumed to be the site of Jesus' birth in Judah because the Messiah ben David must come from Judah. *This* particular town is not mentioned in the tribal allotment in Joshua's account but appears later, in the story of David fighting the Philistines. The original Bethlehem, in Josh 19:15, was actually allotted to the tribe of Zebulun, in Galilee, bordering Asher.⁸ Not surprisingly, this northern town is given little or no attention in most mainstream interpretations.

Searching for any clues to a geographical (as well as a symbolic) Nazareth, I came up with two potential places. The first is Zarethan, a simple phonetic inversion, with the '-an' ending reversed and placed at the beginning. Most atlases base their location of Zarethan on the description of 1 Kgs 7:46, combined with that in Josh 3:16, making it somewhere along the Jordan, just north of Succoth (the site of which is also ambiguous), on the eastern bank. However, a few chapters earlier, in 1 Kgs 4:12, Zarethan is said to be a boundary marker between two of the twelve districts in the kingdom of Solomon. It is said to lie "below Jezreel, beside Bethshean" only a few miles south of the present-day, *estimated* position of Nazareth, yet no one questions this!

At the time of Jesus' birth, Zarethan would have been right on the border between Samaria and Galilee. It was only in 6 CE, when the tetrarchy imposed a redefinition of borders that Zarethan would have become a town in the district of Galilee; before this time, it was a town of Samaria. If Jesus was born here, he would definitely be a native of Samaria. What is more significant, though, for Jesus tends to be rather nostalgic in his ideas, is the fact that this lies in the original tribal territory of Manasseh, i.e., Josephite land. The name is easily adapted to invoke symbolic meaning and to link it with Arzareth, the mythical home of the exiled followers of the religion of Abraham.

This is close but if the alternative to "Messiah ben Joseph" is "Messiah ben Ephraim" and not Manasseh, there must be a stronger

⁸ Yet again, there is a duality here—two Bethlehems, one in northern territory, one in the southern but to make matters even more interesting, the southern site can also be identified as Ephrath (from Gen 35:19, 48:7), the site of the burial of Rachel. Compare this to what I say about Rachel in "The Road to Shiloh."

connection to the Ephraimite tradition; and what of Jesus' apparent identification with Joshua, the Ephraimite? There *is* a town that marks one of the boundaries of the territory of Ephraim. In Josh 16:7 it is called Naarah (or Naarah) and in 1 Chr 7:28, Naaran.

In the word Nazareth is the term *nazar*, meaning "to set apart/to consecrate" and *eth*, meaning "the self," which stems from 'owth, meaning a sign or omen. This, in turn, stems from 'uwth which means "to come." Jesus is thus the one consecrated, just as Joseph is the one 'set apart' in Gen 49:26 ; he is the *sign* (cf. Zech 3:8), he is the one who has 'come': "I stirred up one from the north and he has come" (Isa 41:25).

Jesus is, in effect, a Nazarite (a consecrated one), i.e., "a Nazarite to God from birth ... who shall begin to deliver Israel" (Judg 13:5; cf. Isa 1:22). Both the Samaritans and the Qumran sect had Nazarites and this is the reason why the FG describes Jesus as the *christos*, the 'anointed one', for it simply means he is God's chosen, his representative; it is *not* contingent upon the Messiah ben David concept. It may refer to Jesus' status as the King of Israel (which becomes more probable in light of the crucifixion/burial scenes) but it just as likely refers to his (unorthodox) high priestly status, which is depicted throughout the FG.

The prophecies of Jer 30:18–21, Ezekiel 37, Daniel 7, and Zechariah 3 each allude to the salvation of many through the actions of just one figure. In Jeremiah, this figure is a *high priest* who rises from the "tents of Jacob,"⁹ and in Zechariah, most significantly perhaps, he is Joshua, the *high priest* who wins for his people the right of access to the Lord's new (purified) house.

Time

Jesus and John do not meet at Passover in John 1, which really would be a relatively ineffectual time to preach *repentance*, but just before the Day of Atonement, when such matters are at the forefront of priestly and prophetic concerns, i.e., the tenth day of the seventh month, Tishri (October).

Jesus and his first disciples stay/rest together, indoors, from "about four o'clock in the afternoon." The English translation loses some of the meaning here, however, for in the Greek, Jesus is inside by "about the tenth hour." Traditionally, the Jewish civil day runs from sunset to sunset. If this is the Day of Atonement, it is designated as a day of fasting (hence no

⁹ The interpretation of the 'prince' in Jer 30:21 as a 'high priest' is legitimate, for none other could approach God so closely, as the poem itself suggests; the context is messianic but a distinction is made between the 'king', David, and the 'prince', who remains unnamed.

Passover feast is mentioned) and of sabbatical rest (Lev 23:26f), i.e., they stay put. According to Josephus (*Ant.* 16.6.2), the day of preparation for Sabbath lasts up to the ninth hour, or about 3 P.M. Jesus and the disciples, then, are inside *just* in time to observe *their* Day of Atonement Sabbath, according to the law (Lev 16:29–34).

The Hebrew fascination with numbers is legendary; appreciating the use of gematria, for instance (i.e., the assigning of numerical value to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and thereby encoding or extracting hidden information), is a vital tool in the biblical historian's toolbox. I propose that this number "ten" is *intended* to allude to the tenth day (e.g., of Tishri), purposefully directing our attention to the Day of Atonement. The ancient way of dividing the day was to allot a period of three hours per division; this allowed plenty of time for people to get to the temple for services. The third 'hour' of the day was (roughly) 6 to 9 A.M., the sixth hour 9 to 12 midday, the ninth hour 12 to 3 P.M., and the twelfth hour 3 to 6 P.M. (The night, broken down into first, second, third, and fourth 'watches', was likewise divided. Although the twenty-four-hour timing system was in everyday use by the Romans, the Talmud, written between the first and fourth centuries CE, still makes reference to the 'watches' of the night.)

The "tenth hour" is thus incongruous with the average allocation of time; why not simply say they were inside by the ninth hour? Would a single hour really have made that much of a difference to the narrative? Well, yes, but *only* if a Sabbath is implied, or some other symbolic meaning is intended. The "tenth hour" invites us to make the connection to the Day of Atonement on the *tenth day* of the month (Lev 23:32 stipulates the 'ninth day of the month at evening,' making it, in effect, the beginning of the tenth day). The Passover lamb, on the other hand, although *selected* on the tenth of Nisan (Exod 12:3), is not actually *killed* until the evening of the fourteenth (effectively, the fifteenth; traditionally, a Friday).

Each time a specific hour is mentioned in the FG, then, it corresponds to a calendar date, i.e., a day on which a special event takes place. An 'hour' that deviates from the regulated divisions of time indicates a *precise* day of the month, while that which is phrased according to the standard divisions (third, sixth, ninth, twelfth) suggest a *symbolic* day that is otherwise not mentioned, and this can fall *within* a three hour/day division. For example: the 'third hour' (not mentioned in the FG) could mean 6–9 A.M. *or* the sixth to the ninth day of the month; the "tenth hour" indicates the tenth day of the month and a vague sense of the time, i.e., between 3 and 4 P.M. The following table illustrates how significant and *consistent* this code is in the FG, though the other entries are yet to be discussed.

Table of Hours

Citation	Hour	Day	Festival	Month
John 1:39	Tenth (4 P.M.)	10 th	Day of Atonement	Tishri
John 4:6	Sixth (9–12 noon)	9 th to 12 th + “two days”	Passover	Nisan
John 4:52	Seventh (1 P.M.)	7 th	Pentecost	Siwan
John 19:14	Sixth (9–12 noon)	9 th to 12 th Precedent escape (Zedekiah)	Passover	Nisan
		10 th day (symbolic)	Day of Atonement (symbolic)	

3

STATEMENTS OF INTENT

IN THE MESSIAH BEN JOSEPH traditions, the anticipated in-gathering of the nation begins in Upper Galilee. If Jesus' initial meeting with John takes place on the far side of the Jordan, not far from Qumran, Jesus must now return to the north to begin his work.

One of the most confusing and difficult issues to deal with in the FG is its timeline. I provide further discussion on this where I feel it necessary and offer an overall time chart in the Appendix to help explain how I see the flow of FG events on a pragmatic level. The wedding scenario of John 2, the feeding episode of John 6, and the entry into Jerusalem are the three areas of concern. I only realised the timeline issue when nearing the completion of my research, so I was forced to do a rethink when it came to describing these scenes. Rather than disregarding what I was convinced was a valid interpretation on a theological level, I chose to *add* commentary, where needed, concerning the potential shift in the narrative's chronology.

Each of these three scenes has a theological significance that the FG author deems more significant than their historical contribution to the narrative. They are manipulated and exploited for symbolic ends, though deep within their depiction are buried away the clues we need to follow the physical, rather than the spiritual story of Jesus. It can seem a little overwhelming at first but even this is the intention of the FG author as part of the winnowing process that we see enacted within its narrative. There are secrets to be kept from getting into the hands of the wrong people even though the 'good news' must be disseminated.

We are invited to a wedding (John 2), one of the most profoundly symbolic events in Israelite society, in which the seven-fold blessing culminates in a prayer for the reunification of the nation. Here at Cana of Galilee the first of Jesus' seven "signs" occurs (*semeia*, as the original Greek text of the FG calls them, as opposed to "miracles" in the Christian tradition).¹

¹ The seven traditionally noted are in John 2:1–11 (water into wine); 4:46–54 (healing the boy); 5:1–15 (healing the lame man); 6:5–14 (feeding the multitude);

Cana

Cana is an example of a name that has a certain degree of contextual significance, yet it, too, is seldom given due attention. We have to remember that there is a symbolic aspect to such names, as well as a geographical one. The name itself (*Kana* in the Greek, *Qanah* in Hebrew/Aramaic) has several meanings. Traditionally, it is “the place of reeds” but it can also mean “creation,” with the connotation of recovering, redeeming, or restoring. It is also a play on, or an abbreviation of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the land the Israelites would again possess in the *ideal* future.

Geographically, Cana has been allocated a position quite close to the modern-day *estimated* position of Nazareth, about eight miles north-east (though some scholars prefer to place it about nine miles due north). I am in agreement with Eusebius, however, who reckoned the FG Cana to be the Cana mentioned in Josh 19:28, which is just south-east of Tyre. Not only does this allow for OT corroboration, it places Cana in the tribal territory of Asher, the very tribe from which the only openly-declared northern person in the NT comes from, i.e., Luke’s prophetess, Anna, who hails the imminent redemption of Israel.

Again, people taking the gospel literally consider the time frame of John 1–2 and deduce that Cana has to be within a certain distance, if Jesus is to make the journey relatively quickly. Although interpreters often mention that Josephus *lived* in Cana of Galilee, which he tells us in *Life* (16), they tend to omit that later in his account, Josephus tells of an arduous overnight trek to Tiberias (on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee), from Cana. Had he been travelling from the site near Nazareth, Josephus’s journey wouldn’t have taken more than a few hours, traversing only about ten miles but from the Asherite Cana the journey would be about thirty miles. This sounds more like Josephus’ long haul.

Also, in *Life* (71), Josephus describes a blockade set up near Julius, on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee, intended to “hinder the inhabitants from getting provisions out of Galilee” via Cana and Gamala. Gamala lies to the east of Julius, east of the Sea. The traditional site of Cana is not on a major trade route but rather, up in the hills north of Sepphoris, a major city of the day, which *does* lie on the trade route from Ptolemais (which is on the shore of the Mediterranean). The Cana in Asherite land, however, *is* directly on the main trade route from Tyre, also on the coast, and more directly enroute to Upper Galilee and the area around Julius. So, if provisions are sent south, Sepphoris would be the aim of the blockade, not some village in

6:16–24 (walking on water); 9:1–7 (healing the blind man); 11:1–45 (raising Lazarus).

the hills further south. This more northern Cana allows for Jesus' messianic mission to begin in Upper Galilee, just as the Messiah ben Joseph tradition prescribes.

Symbolic Union

The character of Nathanael, the representative of the Remnant of Israel, comes from Cana (John 21:2). In terms of the twelve tribes, he represents Asher and is intrinsically linked to the wedding scenario that is about to take place. It is the third day; in the Jewish calendar the third day is a Tuesday. The FG also uses the "third day" phrase as a literary device, a symbolic rendition of an ancient biblical motif. If you count the Day of Atonement in John 1:35–9 as the first theological 'day' of Jesus' mission, 'day two' is the day he declares himself to Nathanael, the Remnant, and 'day three' is the day in hand. We have no way of knowing what length of time separates these events, as this was not significant to the gospel author at this point. As there are at least five other 'days' implied before this verse of the FG (e.g., John 1:28–9 suggesting two days, 1:35 another day, 1:39 a period of a day, and 1:43 a trip to Galilee of unknown duration), obviously we are looking at a case of theological symbolism, where there is a build up to a momentous "third day."

A wedding is a form of covenant and the sealing of a covenant on the third day provides a sense of *gravitas* and sanctity; the idea of performing a sacred, or special, act on such a day first appears in Gen 22, where Abraham prepares to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering to God. It is God who directs this action, chooses the site, and ensures the outcome; Abraham simply obeys and as a result receives an everlasting covenant for his descendants. In Exod 19, too, the third day is sacrosanct; it is the day Moses ascends the mountain to meet with God, in preparation for the inauguration of the priestly kingdom of Israel. The granting of the commandments and the covenant of Sinai are the result.

The third day, then, is a day of union and ceremony. It is a day of consecration, where the divine and the mundane meet in anticipation of some mutual covenant.² It is just the same in the FG. The wedding takes place on the third day, not only because it is a ritual of union in its own right, nor because the Jewish marriage ceremony is a symbolic reflection of the

² In the Jewish tradition the most propitious day for a wedding is on a Tuesday (as we call it), for this is the third day of Creation and God is heard to say not once but twice how good it was. So we might deduce that this particular wedding *actually* takes place on a Tuesday. Though this may seem purely incidental, there is cause to return to this suggestion later.

marriage between God and Israel but because this is *Jesus'* moment of union with the will of God and with the Remnant. Having received the spirit of authority, Jesus has already assumed his role as God's representative; as Abraham and Moses had both received divine commissions *before* their 'third day' encounters with God, so Jesus follows this tradition. He is the "bridegroom" of John's vision (John 3:29), not the physical groom at this wedding.

As festivals seem to play such an important role in the FG's depiction of Jesus' signs, and as these tend to be reflected in the actions and the dialogue, it is possible that certain festivals are *inferred* in the text, where none is explicitly mentioned. This current scenario is one example, e.g., there is a covenant made on the third day and there are references to purification and to supplying people with sustenance. We know that the Passover festival follows shortly in the narrative, so this wedding is probably in the early days of Nisan (April), when the exodus and the Sinai covenant are celebrated. With the Remnant an implicit factor of the scene, there is also the idea of emancipation.

Many interpreters now consider the *possibility* that this is actually Jesus' own wedding but I doubt that it is probable. In Jesus' society a boy becomes a man at age thirteen; legally, though perhaps not emotionally, he is ready to marry, though usually he waits until he is about seventeen, or eighteen. Even those who undergo temporary vows of chastity, be they Nazarites or Essenes, etc., are usually married by the age of twenty. One of the prime directives of the HB is, of course, to multiply, and the devout Hebrew would deem it a failure on his part if he didn't produce a family as soon as possible. According to the Talmud, an unmarried man is but half a body, incomplete as Adam without Eve.³ Jesus is, I suggest, *already* married (explained in due course). This wedding *could* be that of Jesus' daughter. If she is marrying Nathanael, Jesus' significance and association with Cana becomes even more important.

As mentioned earlier, *Beth + ab + ara* (the alternative to Bethany) translates as "house of the father of Ara," who was an Asherite, the descendants of whom amalgamated with the Josephite tribes through marriage. Here it is in action! Nathanael, representing the tribe of Asher, makes an alliance with Jesus' Josephite family. This is the *beginning* of the reunion of the Remnant, in Cana-an, the Promised Land. It may explain why Luke's prophetess, Anna, comes from Asher.

It may also explain why, when Jesus is called upon to supply more

³ "God utters a curse against those who remain single after they are twenty years of age; and those who marry at sixteen please him, and those who do so at fourteen still more." *Kiddushin*, fol. 29, col. 2.29, col. 2.

wine, he reacts to the request as if to say, “Why me?” Traditionally, it is the *groom’s* house in which the marriage feast is prepared and it is thus the groom’s responsibility to provide his guests with enough victuals (and the “master of the feast” who calls the bridegroom [*not* Jesus] to enquire after the wine is generally the groom’s, not the bride’s, father). If Jesus were the groom, the request would have been anticipated. Jesus, then, becomes father-in-law to Nathanael and the sense of his responsibility for the Remnant is heightened (symbolically).

The Jars

There are no miracles in the FG. What Christianity preserves as supernatural acts that prove Jesus’ divinity are, in the FG, simply metaphors, or scriptural allusions that turn what is probably a very deliberate, even planned situation, into a theological statement of intent. This is the first of a certain type of sign, a ‘wonder’, which is to be interpreted in terms of Jesus’ overall message, although there are seven of this type (see note 1, above), there are other signs, too, which must not be ignored (e.g., the storming of the temple).

As other interpreters have suggested, there are probably *six* jars of purification water in order to infer a certain discrepancy, as the number seven is a fairly universal symbol of perfection. I suggest, however, that it has nothing to do with the legitimacy of the *rite* of purification, per se, as some Christian schools of thought hold but rather, that it pertains to the *difference* between the establishment’s idea of purification and Jesus’.

Water would be present for purifying the hands before the meal, the wedding couple themselves, etc. There is nothing unusual about such jars being there, though current archaeological research suggests only wealthy families owned stone jars like this, at least until the middle of the century when, one Talmudic source states “purity broke out among the Jews” (Tosef. Shab. 1:14). Thereafter they became popular as part of the domestic mikvah, or immersion pool. Waters of purification are a complex topic but suffice it to say that purification water, especially at a wedding, is not to be drawn water, as earthen vessels are not ritually pure, but as new stone vessels become available, these are deemed sufficiently pure to convey and hold mikvah water.

It is difficult to discern if the jars are only partially full (and thus have *room* for more water), or are standing empty, not being used. The jars are not full, *that* is the point. The partially empty jars are like the “cracked cisterns” of the relapsed Israelites that “can hold no water” (Jer 1:13). Jesus orders these jars to be “filled to the brim,” to overflowing, like the fountain of “living waters” that only complete loyalty to God’s word can bring. *That* is all he does. It is the theological implication of this order (not even an

action on Jesus' part) that creates the 'sign' within the narrative: Return to the original laws, the original worship, and life itself will be overflowing with joy and prosperity.

*It is a time of distress for Jacob,
yet he shall be rescued from it.
Jer 30:7*

Remember, numbers in the FG are always significant; the author does not include them without intending the reader to learn something from them. The term *metretae* ("measure") is understood to mean approximately forty litres of liquid, but this is not the important aspect here; we need to use the numbers, i.e., 2, 3, 6.

The FG's numerology is fairly basic but it is there. It can be as simple as adding or multiplying two numbers, or implying a certain number within the text. The most significant numbers in the gospel are 3, 7, and 12. In this case, we can have (2 x 3) (i.e., 2 to 3 measures) + 6 (jars) = 12, the number of tribes. As this is the moment of union between the tribes of Asher and Joseph, heralding the gathering-in and reunion of *all* the tribes, I think this is a perfect use of number symbolism that just about anyone can appreciate.

There is, however, another option: 2 + 3 + 6 = 11. How could this be meaningful in the context of the FG's symbolism? Well, I think there may be a foreshadowing here, which actually forms a powerful *inclusio* with Jesus' burial scene, where the number 11 becomes a very significant allusion to the final assembly of Jesus' ministers. I shall explain at the appropriate juncture.

When full, the jars hold about 240 litres of water that supposedly becomes wine. Jesus doesn't just create new wine out of thin air; this is not a miracle. The FG author has used this scenario to show Jesus' intent, i.e., he is metaphorically replacing the *contents* of the jars with something better, just as he intends to replace the *temple* with something better, i.e., a new, *pure* priesthood!

In vino veritas

The 'sign' at Cana serves to further illustrate the degraded moral condition of Israel, as it introduces the concept of an alternative way of life by echoing the drunkenness ideology of the OT. There are three types of wine, or strong drink, in the OT: a) wine that offers solace, or is used for celebrations, etc., such as in Exod 10:19, Judg 9:13, and Ps 104:15; b) wine which dulls the senses to the imbiber's disadvantage, making the will weak, as in Gen 9:21f, Prov 4:17, 20:1, 31:4–6, Hos 4:11, etc.; and c) wine which acts as the

medium for God's wrath or mercy (e.g., Job 21:20, Ps 11:6, Jer 25:15). The basic implication is that the drunken state is self-imposed; there is a subsequent lack of knowledge and understanding, followed by an opportunity to re-establish oneself on a righteous path.

Here in John 2:9 the guests are too intoxicated to appreciate the good wine and there is confusion about where it has come from, reiterating the 'inability-to-see-relief-coming' theme of 1:26, and emphasizing the mysterious origins of Jesus' authority. The good wine itself, of course, represents the righteous path, an almost identical depiction to that set out in the Gospel of Thomas: "I took my place in the midst of the world ... I found all of them intoxicated; I found none of them thirsty ... for the moment they are intoxicated. When they shake off their wine, then they will repent" (Gos Thom 28).

Such an opportunity for redemption, however, demands a certain degree of moral agency; it demands a *choice* between good and evil. This is precisely the situation portrayed throughout the FG; a choice has to be made between Jesus, metaphorically the 'good wine', 'the light', the righteous path, etc., and the current establishment (the bad wine) with its tendency toward personal advancement, arrogance, and even deceit. (According to Isa 1:22, 'wine mixed with water' i.e., bad/weak wine, is a sign of a debauched society.) The choice will be set before the people through the mission Jesus is about to undertake. It will culminate in the scene involving Jesus and Barabbas, in John 18.

The seventh blessing of the Jewish marriage ceremony is a prayer for the reunification of Israel, reflecting on the original marriage at Sinai between God and his chosen 'bride'. This will be discussed shortly but it is vital that we recognise Jesus' first major demonstration of intent, here. Israel's history is replete with covenants made, broken, and remade. The FG has its own version of this pattern that permeates the entire narrative and involves two *other* special characters. The marriage scenario at the outset of the gospel draws our attention to the importance of this ancient motif and helps set the foundation for what is to come. So, the six water jars may also represent all the blessings up to but not including the one most important to Jesus. By highlighting the lack of a seventh blessing there is scope to have Jesus 'step in' and demonstrate that through him reunification will be the very least the nation can hope for; like *comparing* water to wine. What Jesus can offer with the new kingdom is likened to good wine (e.g., *old* vintage wine, echoing the idea of a return to the *old*, better ways).

When the marriage is over, Jesus and his family go "home" to Capernaum (there is no indication how long Jesus stays there).

Bride of God

The original marriage between God and Israel occurs at Mount Sinai, when the priestly nation is betrothed to the divine will through the Ten Commandments and the covenant of the priesthood. Since then, however, Israel has failed to maintain its side of the bargain and has fallen out of favour.

In Ezekiel 16, the anticipated rescue and restoration of Israel is depicted in terms of a female foundling thrown out to die in the wilderness. Completely helpless, the foundling is inspired (in the literal sense of the word) by the passing “spirit” (breath) of God, and lives (i.e., an echo of the Creation story). She grows to be a beautiful woman and becomes the beloved of God, his elect. A covenant is made between the husband (God) and wife (Israel); she is cleansed, anointed, and elevated to the highest status. Although married to God, she is seduced from her loyalty to him by the attractions of other (e.g., Canaanite) gods, who are depicted as her illicit lovers. She has become as a “whore” in the eyes of God, and suffers the consequences of his wrath.

Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she ...
played the whore...? And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she
will return to me’ ... I had sent her away with a decree of divorce.

Jer 3:6–8

The bride, according to Jeremiah, is the “sister” of Judah, i.e., northern Israel, Samaria. She is charged with adultery and is prepared for trial. It is the act of repentance that determines whether the harlot wife is to be forgiven or stoned. If she is truly ashamed of her behaviour, she will be restored to her former glory and reinstated as the beloved companion of God. If she is stubborn, nothing can save her. She is, in the end, forgiven, and the entire process begins again, ending with the ideal of the perfect marriage between humanity and the divine.

In Ezek 20:33f, the theme is taken up once more but in pragmatic terms. This time, the elders of the nation are the focus of indignation and the adulterous action that of defiling *themselves* with idols. The emphasis is upon the jealousy of God and the need for complete fidelity. Even the idea of the final re-marriage is apparent in the action of passing “under the staff” (symbolising the renewed covenant).

Ezekiel 23 reiterates the “whoring” element through the personifications of Samaria and Jerusalem. As capital cities of the northern and southern kingdoms, they once held a place of honour and responsibility. When they forfeited this position through the sinful ways of their inhabitants, they brought the rest of the nation down with them. The hitherto vague nature of God’s wrath is clarified as an invasion from hostile neighbours and

includes plunder and, most significantly, rape. As the “whore” has allowed these strangers to enter her, now they will do so regardless of her consent; she has, according to the allegory, brought this upon herself.

This collective, national responsibility for fidelity and purity, left in the hands of the priests, prophets, scribes, etc., has been neglected. Thus the male influence of the nation, which should have protected and taught, instead ruins and leads astray. The harlot theme is thus used as a device to emphasize the profound guilt of the male populace, in a way that humiliates them, emasculates them, i.e., *they* become as harlots prostituting what should be sacred.

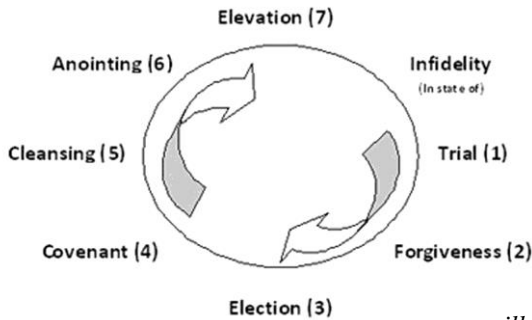
It is Ezekiel 16’s pattern for the Bride of God, the depiction that singles out so clearly the inevitable and sequential rise of Israel (Samaria) to its original glory that the FG seems to emulate, i.e., through the character of the Samaritan woman.

In Hosea’s account, God openly claims that when reparation is made between himself and his people he will take them as his ‘wife’ forever. The prophet is told to find a woman who is an adulteress and to love her, as God has loved the inconstant Israel; but this woman is to be maintained on a sort of probation, until she has proven herself morally sound for a rise in status to ‘wife.’ She is not to see other men, nor have relations with her new partner; she is left utterly to her own devices. So too with Israel; she is to lose the security of civil and religious institutions (e.g., through foreign occupation) until she turns away from her evil ways and returns to a true faith in God.

Hosea returns Israel to the wilderness where the first marriage (or election) had taken place (i.e., the inauguration of the priesthood at Sinai), and tars it with the very brush used to castigate the Canaanite worshippers of Baal, namely, illicit sexual behaviour. Hosea casts a profound doubt on the suitability, or even the right, of Israel to call itself the “chosen of God.” Israel is thus cast into a spiritual void out of which there can be but one means of escape—a return to absolute faith (shown by Abraham, for instance).

In Isaiah’s depiction the spiritual aspect of the divine/mundane marriage is stronger than in any other text, and its positive anticipation of the ideal future state is unequalled. Where Ezekiel concentrates on the current weaknesses and ill favour of Israel, with its redemption contingent upon a difficult and humiliating moral transformation, Isaiah emphasizes the glory of the reunion with God, and the ideal is related in enticing, encouraging terms. Isa 61:1, specifically, calls the message of reunion “good news” (the meaning of “gospel”) and suggests that it is aimed at those who most require, and therefore will most readily accept, the hope it brings. (The Samaritan anticipation of Taheb, the Restorer, is also called “the good news”

and this is significant in that it has a bearing on the post-FG discussion later.) Trials and tribulations will be reversed; mourners will exchange their ashes for garlands; the priestly nation will be reinstated; and the people will be decked in garments of ‘salvation’ which are interpreted as marriage adornments. Yahweh speaks to his people, Israel, saying, “you shall be called My Delight is in Her (*Hephzibah*), and your land married (*Beulah*)” (Isa 62:4–5). The desperation of the age, the wickedness, the fear, will all pass away, and in that day Israel shall become once more the beloved Bride of God



....you will not suffer disgrace...
 For your Maker is your husband....
 Isa 54:4, 5

Thus, the Bride of God motif from the Hebrew Bible begins in state of infidelity, for the female figure is initially on *Trial*; *Forgiveness* follows; then her *Election*; a *Covenant* is made; there is a *Cleansing*; an *Anointing*; and then the ultimate *Elevation*. There are *seven* stages. The jars at the wedding feast, representing the status quo, once again prove insufficient. The final elevation of the Remnant is contingent on Jesus’ success.

Malachi, on the other hand, hails God as “King” (1:14) and “husband” and the diatribe is against the “sons of Levi” to whom the rights of the priesthood were originally granted. It is this covenant, *this* marriage that has been defiled. The priests are male and symbolically take on the role and responsibility of a husband, e.g., protecting and caring for the sacredness of the deity. It is the charge given to the priests (just as the Ark was the charge given to the Sinai priesthood) that takes on the symbolic role of ‘wife.’ The priests have abused and/or neglected their duty as ‘husbands’, as caretakers of the priesthood, protectors of the glory of God.

Temple Tirade

One of the most common interpretations of the temple scene in John 2 is that

Jesus is demonstrating, or foreshadowing, the nullification of the sacrificial system but this is a wholly Christian perspective. No devout Israelite would have considered the worship of God *without* sacrifices, at least, not in Jesus' day. The *concept* of sacrifice is fine; the problem lies more with how and where it is performed and who performs it.⁴ Just as the *rite* of purification itself is *not* repudiated at the wedding, the *rite* of sacrifice, here, is not rejected as a means of worship. The Samaritan perception of sacrifice, recall, is that it is not legitimate *as practised in the temple in Jerusalem*; the return of legitimate sacrifices is an anticipated obligation of 'the Restorer'.

In the FG the temple scene occurs at the very outset of the mission, not at its end, as in the Synoptic accounts. Many scholars find the Synoptic sequence of events much more acceptable because it provides a convenient justification for the anger and animosity of the chief priests and, therefore, the arrest of Jesus soon afterward (though the accusation is one of blasphemy). The FG's placing of the demonstration immediately after the marriage/commission scenario, however, is *theologically* sound and necessary, given the apparent nature of Jesus' mission; so far, *Jesus* knows what his mission is, the Remnant (represented by Nathanael) knows, but Jerusalem does not. Jesus must declare himself, and his intentions, to 'the world'. There is sufficient cause for the Synoptic authors to make this significant change in chronology, as will be explained.

It is often suggested that Jesus' display in the temple is a partial fulfilment of Zech 14:21, where it is prophesied that in the days of the glorious return to God and the coming of the messiah, no "traders" will be in the "house of the Lord." There is, though, more to this than meets the eye, and the careful reader will gradually come to realise that even the concept of "traders" is exploited to fit the FG author's specific tale.

The timeframe of this episode is rather intriguingly vague, with the FG simply stating that Jesus remains with his family in Capernaum for "a few days" (John 2:12). The possibility that this scene might be repositioned to fit the theology rather than the true chronology of the movement could be the reason for this lack of detail, where in other places we get very specific depictions of time. That the festival is designated "of the Jews" reinforces the schism between the Samaritan practices and the Jewish (in Jerusalem).⁵

⁴ Josephus (*Ant.* 18.1.5) states that the Essenes, the sect now associated with Qumran, refused to offer regular sacrifice at Jerusalem and chose to offer their own, 'more pure' sacrifices. Evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests prayer and purity were considered sacrifices of a sort.

⁵ Josephus tells us of the Samaritans who profaned the Jerusalem temple (during the term of the procurator Coponius, 6–9 CE) by bringing dead bodies into it on the festival of Passover. Whether this is true, or hyperbole, we don't know but whatever actually occurred, the Samaritans were thenceforth excluded from the temple and

That Jesus attends such festivals isn't so much proof of his devotion to the laws concerning attendance at the sanctuary, as evidence of his determination to stir up a hornets' nest there during religiously and politically sensitive times.

The observance of the Passover, of course, is described in Exod 12:1–28, and Jesus' behaviour in the temple is, in part, linked to this precedent. Moses, on seeing his people worshipping the golden calf, destroys the sacred tablets of stone (Exod 32:19f); likewise, Jesus performs *this* violent act of defiance against the impropriety of current worship. The temple has, in effect, become but another 'golden calf'; destroy the false (tainted) image of God and the true God will forgive and return.

Return to me, and I will return to you....
Mal 3:7

The final destruction of the Nehushtan, the brazen serpent raised in the wilderness by Moses (Num 21:4f), offers another precedent. According to 2 Kgs 18:4–6, Hezekiah tears down and demolishes the object, which has become an idol in its own right, i.e., the people are concerned more with making offerings to *it* than to God, whose power it represents. The temple, by extension, with all its legal debates, and its concentration on making money from sacrifices, etc., means little if the worship of God is forgotten.

It is also just before Passover that Joshua prepares the new generation of Israelites for the entry into the Promised Land (Josh 5:10f); the 'wicked' generation has perished in the wilderness and those who are born *out* of bondage receive the circumcision of the flesh, marking them as the new, cleansed, elect of God. Likewise, Jesus is to lead the *new* elect into the spiritual Promised Land, where a "circumcision of the heart" will allow them entry into the kingdom of God (see Deut 30:1–6). Surely, though, Jesus does not suppose that forcing the moneychangers and the men who sell sacrificial animals out of the temple precinct will be enough preparation for the coming of the messiah, or the return of God's blessing? No, this is a sign of intent, not fulfilment. So, why must these "traders" be expunged?

In his only overtly violent outburst in the gospels, Jesus wields a whip against the men in the outer courts of the temple, the *hieron*; when he mentions the *destruction* of the temple and when the Jews react, however, the term *naos* is used, and this is the word that denotes the sacred inner area of the temple, not the outer courts (i.e., they recognise the significance of his

security was stepped up (*Ant.* 18.2.2). Apart from anything more damning to exclude him, Jesus' mere presence as a Samaritan, let alone his actions, would be enough to warrant his arrest and expulsion from the temple precinct.

‘sign’ though they mock it). Jesus’ hostility is *directed*, that is, toward the temple *proper*, the *naos* built by priests for priests, not toward the actual tradesmen, though they take the brunt of the violence.

Naos is also used in the Septuagint version (LXX) of Mal 3:1, where it is declared that once the “messenger” has prepared the way, God will return to his sacred place, the holy centre of his house. If the sanctified area of the temple, not the precinct, is identified with the “house of merchandise,” its so-called “traders” *must* be the priesthood.

That the priesthood of the temple in Jerusalem is corrupt is not a new idea, e.g., “... oppression and fraud do not depart from its *marketplace* (i.e., implying “traders”; Ps 55:11); “No one who practices deceit shall remain in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue in my presence” (Ps 101:7).

This offers a very satisfactory precedent for Jesus’ storming of the temple but it also gives us a clue to the identity of the “father of lies” mentioned in John 8:44–5, which I shall have reason to discuss again. If the priesthood, the caretakers of God’s house, are the ones who “utter lies” then the “father of lies” must be the incumbent high priest, in this instance, Caiaphas.

*The priests did not say, “Where is the Lord?”
Those who handle the law did not know me
Jer 1:8*

*They have held fast to deceit ... How can you say, “We are wise,
and the law of the Lord is with us,” when, in fact,
the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie?
Jer 8:5, 8*

In Jeremiah 8, God is denouncing the false worship and misleading “wisdom” of those who claim authority falsely, “from prophet to priest” (Jer 8:10).

The Book of Malachi, however, offers an even stronger potential source for the *ideology* behind Jesus’ demonstration, as the emphasis is upon the cessation of meaningless, or *tainted*, sacrifices (*not the ritual itself*). The covenant with the priests, Malachi 2 implies, was a covenant “of life”; this has been corrupted and Israel has lost favour in the eyes of God (i.e., symbolically, it is dead). Israel, the once priestly and holy kingdom, has been unfaithful to the “wife of his youth” (i.e., God’s essence) and has been rejected. Divorce (spiritual death) is not the ideal state, so Israel must amend its ways and work for reconciliation, but in order for God to return to “his temple” (3:1), a “messenger” must first “purify” the sons of Levi (the priesthood) of their inherited iniquities, i.e., “from the sins of the fathers” (see also Job 36:8–9 and Isa 5:18–23). Only when the house of God is

cleansed (and the actual job of ritually cleansing the temple, on a day to day basis, falls to the priests, making Jesus' actions even more inflammatory to the extant cultus), will its incumbents' "burnt offerings and ... sacrifices ... be accepted on [the] altar" (Isa 56:7). Whether that altar remains in Jerusalem or is reinstated in the 'true Israel' is another matter!

The impulsive and forceful nature of Jesus' action and his words, "Destroy this temple" (John 2:19), reflect Isa 10:20–7, where the situation being depicted is one of dire circumstance; the Remnant of Israel is oppressed and weary. "Destruction is decreed" but this destruction is one that will, ultimately, allow the Remnant to escape the torment of its enemies. God will turn his wrath toward the oppressors, "wield[ing] a whip against them" (Isa 10:26), just as Jesus wields a whip against the "traders," the corrupt priesthood that oppresses its own people. This concept of emancipation surfaces again, in the context of the temple priests, when we take a look at Jesus' healing signs.

The decree of destruction preserved in 1 Sam 2:27–36 is even more interesting. The priesthood is threatened with imminent demise because of its iniquities. It is declared that a new, "faithful priest" will be "*raise[d] up*," who will work according to God's will, who will have a *new* "house" built for him, and who will minister "before" the messiah.

The most intriguing precedent, however, comes in 2 Kings 23, where Josiah storms into Jerusalem and throws out the paraphernalia of the "sun worshippers" and the illicit sacrificial altars. He defiles the high (sacred) places in the surrounding countryside by taking the bones out of the tombs and burning them on the altars, including one at Bethel. When he spies a tomb that has been made into a monument, he asks whose it is, and the Samaritans say that it is the tomb of a "man of God" who came up from Judah (Judea) to prophesy that this destruction would happen. Josiah refers to him as the "prophet who came out of Samaria" and leaves his tomb intact. This itinerant prophet is Ahijah, a *Josephite from Shiloh* (1 Kgs 11:36). Just as the Messiah ben Joseph tradition would later stipulate, here we have an allusion to a northern man of god coming out of Judea, in the context of the destruction of temples. Can this really be mere coincidence, or might Jesus have visited this tomb on his travels and been inspired?

Jesus declares that the new temple will rise three days after this one's destruction (John 2:19); again, the author uses the 'third day' motif, implying that the creation of the new temple will involve a union (reunion) with the divine, i.e., the anticipated eventuality of Malachi 3. In preparation for this, Mal 4:2 brings the promise of 'healing' and emancipation for the righteous. The mission of Jesus in the FG is thus *apparently* prophesied (i.e., it intentionally 'fulfils' prophecy) but not in the sense that makes him the Davidic messiah. He is the prophet-priest, come to destroy the iniquitous

priesthood of the temple, in preparation for the new kingdom at Shiloh.

John 2:21–5 is an addendum, very obviously trying to explain to later readers how this episode relates to the Christian ideal. The format of Jesus' words in 2:19 is not one of a conditional phrase, e.g., 'If you destroy this temple ...'; it is, rather, an imperative, an order. In other words, 'Give up this folly! I will show you the *real* house of God'. The 'three days' reference is, I agree, an intended allusion to *a* death and *a* resurrection but not, as the addendum implies, to Jesus'. It applies, rather, to the death of an age, the passing of an era, and the resurrection of the true Israel and the holy priesthood. This will make more sense once I discuss the Samaritan woman and Jesus' declaration to her.

A Vital Clue

The reference to "forty-six years" (John 2:20) is so precise it begs the question: is the FG author trying to provide us with a true chronology for his account? Why not just tell us outright the year according to the Jewish, or indeed, the Samaritan calendar? We will see in due course that the author has good reason to avoid certain historical associations. If we take the reference at face value, however, we will be able to discern the year of Jesus' temple demonstration. The only source we really have for any corroboration of dates regarding the temple is Josephus' *Antiquities*.

In *Ant.* 15.11.2, having first told us that Herod began his great project of refurbishing and extending the original temple of Solomon in his eighteenth year as ruler, which would have been c.20 BCE, Josephus goes on to suggest the following preparations before any work was actually carried out: 1000 wagons were constructed to haul the stone from the quarry; 10,000 skilled workmen were hired; 1000 sacerdotal garments were commissioned for the priests who insisted they construct the inner temple; these priests were trained as stone-cutters and carpenters; the old temple was then razed and cleared before any work commenced. We can only estimate the time this impressive preparation must have taken but two or three years would not seem improbable. For argument's sake, let's say the first stone was laid sometime around 18 BCE.

Scholars often suggest there was constant titivating right up to c. 64 CE, so anything near an accurate dating from this comment would be all but impossible. I suggest, however, that this 'titivating' comprised quite a distinct programme of *renovation*, not new construction. Josephus remarks (in *Ant.* 15.11.3) that the Jews were hoping, "in the days of Nero," to "raise again" certain sections of Herod's structure that had sunk quite dramatically in its foundations, allowing some to fall down completely. He states quite clearly that the inner temple, the *naos*, took only eighteen months to

complete and that the rest of the temple complex proper, i.e., “the cloisters and outer enclosures” (*hieron*) took eight years (from around 18 BCE). This brings us to 10 BCE; a simple calculation that becomes a common tool in deciphering the FG’s numerical symbolism.

Now this is an interesting point: If you search the Internet for references to “forty-six” in the FG, you will find page after page of Christian translations and interpretations explaining that the number is merely an estimate (pretty precise estimate!) or symbolic (of?), or that it refers to ongoing construction, etc. Most date the building from c. 20 BCE, to arrive at the year 26 CE for the temple scene, which is too early to sit comfortably with their preconceived dating of the gospel and/or Jesus’ actions.

One comment, in a published book on the FG (which I will not cite) literally states that readers need not be concerned with this exact number, for it doesn’t “fit the facts” (which *are*?) and because it detracts from Jesus’ message! As it was my method to try to unlock the secrets of the FG *without* reference to secondary sources, I battled with this conundrum for years, arriving at a variety of possibilities but each affected several other elements in the gospel text. It was only toward the end of my research that I allowed myself to investigate a little further. I had come to the conclusion that “forty-six years” refers to the time elapsed from the *completion* of the temple to the time of Jesus’ tirade therein, for that is how the Greek reads, to me.

Apparently, much celebration and fanfare marked the final construction of the temple and the timing of the event made the festivities even grander, for it occurred on the very anniversary of Herod’s inauguration, the first of Nisan (April), i.e., the month of Passover (thus the anniversary of the temple’s completion would be in the minds of the Jews just at this time, making their specific reference in context).

The words *naos* and *hieron* can be used interchangeably to a degree, but it is the FG author’s clever technique of placing the truth on the antagonists’ lips that we see in action in this scene. By using the former, *naos*, the Jews reveal that they comprehend perfectly well Jesus’ insinuations but in their reference to the dating of the temple, they allude to the entire complex, for which there *is* an historical record; the inauguration of the temple in Jerusalem *was* celebrated in 10 BCE, the same year Herod’s building programme in Caesarea was completed. Look to Christianity for this information and you will be hard-pressed to find it. Look to the Jewish historical documents and you can find it in one click of the mouse. The author of the FG expects his readers to know this significant historical detail and indeed, they would have. This may sound obvious but 10 BCE plus “forty-six years” equals 36 CE. What can Christianity do with *that* date, when tradition maintains a crucifixion in about 33 CE? *It must be wrong—right?*

I will argue the case that this is one of two precise historical reference points in the gospel. It gives us the year Jesus made a violent demonstration in the temple at Jerusalem (the second appears in John 5). Ironically, it also proves the Synoptics *right* in their unified tale of Jesus entering the city and disrupting the temple courts just prior to his arrest. This *is* the correct positioning of the scene. Scholars have been correct in their claim that the FG author has his own agenda and manipulates events to make his theological message clear but this is because the historical detail of what *actually* occurred is simply too provocative and potentially damning to include in his testimony.

For now, we must continue with the FG narrative but it will soon become clear that there are other examples of this literary licence. The author of the FG provides this exact dating as part of his duty to record the *history* of the original movement, though his obligation to bear witness to Jesus' spiritual mission takes precedence.

4

MARTHA

AFTER STRUGGLING WITH THE QUESTION of Jesus and Mary's relationship for several years, I finally had to face the evidence that was staring me in the face all along, i.e., Jesus is, indeed, married in the FG. The persistent duality of the gospel, so much an element of its composition, provides us with two of almost everything, reflecting both the mundane facts and the esoteric nature of its theology. This aspect is no different; there are two 'wives' in the story. Before we go any further with this idea, and for lack of a more appropriate juncture to explain her character, we need to give Martha a chance to be recognised, for she is perhaps one of the most understated women in the Bible. Martha is Jesus' wife. This strays somewhat from the current popular debate about Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The theory that Jesus and Mary have a sexual relationship is no longer ground breaking and much has been written and surmised on the subject but what has not come to the fore, in any satisfactory way, is how Martha fits into this equation.

The Christian tradition can cope, I think, with the idea that maybe, in his humanity, Jesus *did* have the need for a physical relationship but can it handle the notion that in having such a relationship with Mary he is, in fact, becoming an adulterer, or even a polygamist? These are questions that inevitably arise as we progress but the gospel author has anticipated such a reaction and deals with the delicate subject most adeptly.

The FG holds many clues to the complex interrelationships between Jesus, Mary, Lazarus, and Martha. The first three form the central nexus that links the entire theology of the gospel but Martha seems to be somewhat of an odd, misplaced, uncomfortable character. She has come down in tradition as the slightly resentful, perhaps jealous 'servant' who plays second fiddle to Jesus' favourite, Mary.

Martha is mentioned in the Synoptics only in Luke 10:38–42. She is either not considered important enough by the others to warrant a mention, or they knew nothing of her at all, as the focus of their gospels was not the same as the FG's. It is interesting that Luke seems to suggest that the Jesus/Mary/Martha/Lazarus group were living farther north, in Galilee, before moving down to Bethany (near Jerusalem), as this is precisely what

occurs in the FG; the house at Bethany is a strategic location for Jesus' plan down in Judea but this external verification of the northern 'family unit' is important to bear in mind. Also similar is the fact that both Luke and the FG portray Martha as a rather fussy, anxious character and this figures in the overall assessment of her role.

Martha Myth

In mediaeval legend Martha takes on a strange, almost fairy-tale portrayal as a veritable dragon-slayer! She is said to flee Palestine with Mary and Lazarus, settling in Avignon, France.

According to the legend, there existed in the area of Nerluc, Provence, a terrible, Grendel-like monster called the Tarasque. It was a chimera, with six bear's legs, an ox's body, a spiked turtle's shell, and a scaly tale that ended in a scorpion's sting. It had the head of a lion but horse's ears, and the face of an old man. The Tarasque was said to have been the offspring of a creature called the Onachus (from Galatia, a place in central Anatolia, now Turkey) that burned everything it touched, and the Leviathan of biblical fame.

Just as in *Beowulf*, the king of Nerluc and his knights were losing an extended battle against the tormenting, destructive beast, until along came a saviour, in this case Saint Martha. With hymns and prayers Martha lured the Tarasque into the town, where the local residents killed it. She proceeded to preach, converting the town to Christianity. She supposedly ended her days in this same town, now called Tarascon, and the local Collegiate Church is said to house Martha's tomb. Every June, the people of Provence gather to celebrate Martha's victory over the Tarasque with games, parades, and re-enactments.

The first evidence the legend is in a manuscript in the Oxford Library and is attributed to Archbishop Raban Maur, of Mayence, who lived in the ninth century and claimed his sources stemmed from the fifth century. What makes this legend appear to have some basis in historical fact, however diluted, is the fact that the crypt at the church in Tarascon *does* attest to a *first century* Christian community.

Another tradition suggests that fourteen years after Jesus' death, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, Martha, St. Maximin (who is said to have baptised Mary Magdalene), Sidonius (the 'blind man'; this will prove an interesting correlation later), Sera (the maid of Mary Magdalene, suggesting an esteemed status), and the body of Anne (Jesus' grandmother in the Synoptic tradition) were put into a boat with no sails or oars *by the Jews*. They were set adrift and came to rest on the shores of Southern France. There is wisdom in heeding myths, so I'll come back to this.

Martha as Wife

The image of the proselytising dragon slayer may have its roots in the unusual strength of the character illustrated so subtly in the FG. This is not a strength that involves good deeds, or strong faith, or obvious suffering, for Martha is not depicted in such terms. She is very pragmatic, very much a woman who is at her best in the family home. She has such an intimate association with Jesus and later, with Mary and Lazarus, that she demands more attention than has been given her.

There are at least twelve separate clues to Martha's role as Jesus' wife that few biblical scholars take the time to analyse individually, let alone in concert. Perhaps the consequences are just too provocative for mainstream researchers but here, we will throw caution to the wind and assess the evidence with an open mind:

★ Jesus' theological mission is instigated by the figure called his "mother" at the wedding in Cana. Although Jesus is supposedly invited to this celebration, his mother seems to think it is his responsibility to procure more wine for the other guests. The Greek word for "mother" is *meter*, which can mean a *mother figure*, not necessarily one's biological mother, i.e., it can be used in a figurative rather than a literal sense. In various cultures one might call one's wife "mother" if there are children.

★ Jesus' reaction to this demand is as if to say "Why me?" and this is fitting, given that it is the duty of the *groom's father* to supply the venue and the food for the wedding. Thus, Jesus begins his work with the order of a woman and will come to end it in the same fashion, i.e., with an order from Martha (for Jesus to come and deal with the Lazarus issue, John 11:20–27), the last of the seven signs in the gospel.

★ Jesus' curtness in John 2:4 is almost striking: "Woman, what concern is that to you and me?" Although such a response would have been considered reprehensible behaviour had Jesus been replying to his *mother's* request or direct order, it *would* suit a husband/wife context, especially where a fastidious and apparently overburdened wife is stepping beyond the bounds of her defined duties.

★ The "mother" in John 2, the Samaritan woman, the adulteress, and Mary are all referred to by Jesus as "woman," using the Greek word *gune*, which tends to (though not always) infer a wife. As we will soon discover, there is ample evidence to link Mary with the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery, but there is also reason to believe that the term "mother" is inextricably linked to Martha. The references to Jesus' mother might well be an amendment by an early Church uncomfortable with the depiction of a

married saviour. How much simpler to change just one word than to have to explain the convoluted relationships, sexual intimacies, and inevitable offspring of a divine, unsullied icon (rather like getting rid of all the awkward characters by setting them adrift in a boat without an oar?).

★ The name Martha means “mistress,” as in “mistress of the house.” This is why, in Luke’s rendition, she is such a homemaker, perturbed by Mary being in ‘her house’ earning Jesus’ attentions with no more than what might be construed as fawning subservience, while *she* is left to fetch and carry. Depicted as being concerned with *serving* in both the marriage scene in John 2 and in Luke’s account, Martha plays the ideal role of wife.

★ By the end of the gospel (John 11:5) we learn that Jesus “loves” Martha. The Greek term *agapao* is used to imply something more than mere respect or fondness. It implies a love of the *heart*, not merely the mind. The others, Mary and Lazarus, are mentioned as extensions of this tender affection, that is, as Jesus’ family. This is precisely how the group at Bethany is supposed to be understood and it is the construct on which the legal and spiritual legacy of Jesus’ mission will come to depend.

★ Martha speaks her mind to Jesus with an unparalleled familiarity. She takes it upon herself to go out into the streets to meet him as he returns to Bethany. She practically chastises him, blaming him for Lazarus’ demise and then has the effrontery to get into a theological debate with him (arguing the finer points of the *eschaton*, the ‘end days’—something women would not normally do, unless in private, with a husband, father, or brother, say).

★ Both Mary and Martha call Jesus “lord” or *kyrios*, which is the title granted the head of a household, i.e., the husband or father. The ambiguity that makes the FG more a riddle than a gospel permeates every aspect, every relationship, and this one in particular will find culmination in the post-crucifixion scenes.

★ Martha mourns Jesus. When Lazarus lies in the tomb and Jesus finally arrives it is she who goes out of doors to meet him, while Mary remains indoors to mourn. When she believes Jesus has died, however, it is Mary who ventures out to be at his side while Martha, the wife, conducts her mourning, as per tradition, in private.

★ Martha is conspicuously absent from the crucifixion scene itself. Why, given Jesus’ admission of his love for her, given their apparently intimate relationship, and especially given her constant, dutiful presence throughout the gospel, is she suddenly cast aside, without further thought, just when you would have thought she would be at the centre of everyone’s attentions?

★ Lo and behold, just at this crucial juncture we suddenly have Jesus' "mother" appear again. Living up in Capernaum (John 2:12), a fair distance to travel for an aging woman, let alone in such a short space of time (consider how long it would take for a message of Jesus' arrest to reach her and then for her to trek on a donkey, or on foot, all the way down to Jerusalem). Nevertheless, the received text of John 19:25 would seem to suggest she manages it. If, however, we remove the word "mother," assuming it, just for argument's sake, to be a later alteration, the entire scene makes much more sense, especially in light of the following points.

★ This "mother" seems to have brought along with her a "sister," a character whom we have never met, whose name is also Mary. The FG follows very specific rules of presentation, with no name, measure, character, or place introduced without a direct link to the central symbolism of its theology. In other words, nothing is gratuitous. This sudden appearance of Jesus' long-since absent and aging parent, along with his obscure aunt jars with the consistent style of the document. It is even more perplexing for the author to suddenly insert another 'Mary' into the plot without explanation or symbolic significance. The only "sisters" to be depicted in the FG are Mary and Martha. In order for the gospel text to be coherent in style and content, which I believe it is, the mother character who stands under the cross is none other than Martha, the motherly figure who made her first appearance at the wedding in Cana and who has been by Jesus' side throughout. Martha's role as mother in the FG does have further potential basis in the narrative, as we shall see.

The FG thus preserves no unequivocal record of Mary the Virgin (or otherwise), mother of Jesus. She is purely a Synoptic phenomenon. It is possible that if the Synoptics do post-date the FG, the problems surrounding Jesus' genealogy, which even Paul denounces as a waste of time trying to make sense of in terms of the 'gospel' to be preached, might have been swept under the theological carpet. By having a virgin as a mother and God as a father, there is no reason to seek out an authentic lineage, as one has been divinely preordained (i.e., for the Davidic messiah).

What we have in the Gospel of John is the consistent, well-rounded, persistent presence of a woman who meets all the criteria of a *wife*. Where the FG now reads "mother," it once read or implied, I suggest, "wife."

5

NICODEMUS AND THE SON OF MAN

BECAUSE OF THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF John 3:1–15, scholars have argued from one extreme perspective to another about what is actually going on here, with many analyses concluding either that Nicodemus is ignorant of the truth in Jesus’ words/actions and that his spiritual progress is thwarted at this early stage or, that the construction of the narrative itself presents complications which require elaborate justifications or readjustments of the text.

Nicodemus, I suggest, is actually one of the clearest *success* stories of the entire gospel and his significance is profound, for through his story is disclosed the *means* by which the Remnant can return to God.

The name Nicodemus means “conqueror/victor for/of the people”; how can that inspire such negative interpretations? To support such a negative appraisal, perhaps, we must consider that he is a “leader” of the “Jews” (John 3:1), a Pharisee; he is also described as “the teacher of Israel” (3:10), a designation originally granted only to priests (Deut 31:9–13, 33:10) but later assumed by the Levites and ultimately, usurped by the Pharisees. The Jews of the FG, the leaders, appear as the antagonists throughout the narrative, so Nicodemus’ is an exemplary case. Like Philip’s declaration in John 1:45, which gives us everything we need to decipher Jesus’ identity, Nicodemus’ depiction provides us with all the information we need to *comprehend* Jesus’ (and the FG’s) theological message. The victory Nicodemus’ name implies is not only a conquest over his own ignorance, I suggest; it is also Jesus’ victory, for this Pharisee’s experience becomes a reflection of Jesus’ own conquest over the “world.”

Nicodemus’ story is told on three distinct levels, though he is present in the narrative elsewhere, under an alternative commission name. The first level depicts an almost mystical conversation between him and Jesus (John 3); the second reveals the first hints of defiance against the establishment that has hitherto been his life (John 7), and the third finds him completely unreserved in his allegiance to Jesus (John 19). The first stage is given the greatest attention and is strikingly similar to the enlightenment tale of Ezra, in 2 Esdras.

The day of judgement is imminent, according to 2 Esdras, a judgement that will separate the faithful from the corrupt and the “dead” from the “living.” This is a diatribe against a wilful and wicked people, whose neglect of God has brought them despair. Ezra questions the declined moral status of Israel in God’s eyes; he is under the impression that Israel has been loyal and true and that it has not been rewarded justly for its goodness. (Noting the Pharisaic context of Nicodemus’ depiction, the echo of this presumption, indeed arrogance, is fundamental to the FG’s general portrait of the proud Pharisees, especially in their attitude in John 9:40–1). In response to this, the angel Uriel is sent to offer Ezra a path to enlightenment.

At the outset, however, Ezra’s understanding is weak, he is ignorant and blind to the truth; this corresponds to the description in John 19:39, of Nicodemus first coming to Jesus “by night” meaning, simply, that as a Pharisee, he walked in a spiritual “darkness” (though this also alludes to his *secret* meetings with Jesus). “You cannot understand the things with which you have grown up; how then can your mind comprehend the way of the Most High?” demands Uriel (2 Esd 4:10). This is simply paraphrased in John 3:12: ‘If I have told you about earthly things, and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?’

Only those whose origins are “in heaven,” the angel continues, can truly understand heavenly matters (4:21, cf. compare John’s argument concerning Jesus’ “purity” i.e., Jesus’ authority is “from heaven,” as is Uriel’s). Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is not considered “from God” (see John 8:47), and thus cannot comprehend heavenly matters *unless* he is reborn from “above” (3:7). The Greek word for “you” here is plural (as in vv.11 and 12), inferring that Nicodemus (like Nathanael) is representing a group, e.g., all those who walk in metaphorical darkness (e.g., the Pharisees). Being “born from above” simply means being *chosen* as, or *choosing* to become, a member of the new order that has its authority ‘in heaven’. It also implies a shedding of presumption, of arrogance, of assumed knowledge.

Ezra is confused, claiming he doesn’t desire knowledge of heavenly things, he merely wishes to understand why Israel appears to have been forsaken. Uriel responds by insisting that the root of ‘evil’, the “place where evil has been sown,” must pass away before the “field where the good has been sown” can “come” (2 Esd 4:29). This theme is apparent in the sign of the old/new wines and the public declaration concerning the old and new temple in John 2, the latter of which Nicodemus is, undoubtedly, fully aware.

Beginning to perceive that the fault may lie within Israel itself, a fault that prolongs the advent of the new era, Ezra demands an explanation. In John 7:5–1, Nicodemus perceives a fault in the rash behaviour of his fellow Pharisees, requesting clarification (this acts as the second stage in Nicodemus’ depiction, which I will discuss again).

Uriel uses the imagery of a woman giving birth at the end of her term, insinuating that the destruction of the old world is an *inevitability* and that the evil will be eradicated and the righteous reborn from the ‘womb’ of Hades (2 Esd 4:41–2). The earthly woman cannot return the child to her womb but the implication is that God can (i.e., where the child is understood to be the spiritually pure Israel). The reproduction theme is echoed within the basic premise of the ‘rebirth’ discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, and in Jesus’ own birth analogy in John 16. For Ezra and Nicodemus the central element of interest is the matter of *signs* pointing to a new truth or reality that is not easily comprehended. *Seeing* the signs and understanding them requires a degree of humility and difficulty; the rebirth (the rite of passage) is a painful one.

Ezra is asked, “why are you disturbed ... why have you not considered in your mind what is to come ...?” (2 Esd 7:15–16). Such a question is reflected in Jesus’ astonishment over Nicodemus’ initial lack of understanding, even though he represents those who claim to ‘teach’ Israel (John 3:9–10). The inadequacy of these teachers is, once again, brought to the fore of the narrative. The underlying order to Ezra, then, is a commission for him to convey what he has learnt to others; he is to *teach* from his experience (cf. 2 Esd 14:22), to show people the path to Life.

The overall essence of this debate on earthly versus heavenly matters is that in order to recognise the ‘kingdom of God’ and in order to return to it, one must remove all preconceptions and convictions. Everything Nicodemus *thinks* he knows will not earn him a place in the new order; he must accept that he is ignorant of the Truth and be willing to be enlightened. Once granted the wisdom of the Spirit, such an enlightened one must teach (not preach to) others, and show them the path to God. This is the first lesson of the gospel, a lesson in humility and concentration. It teaches us how to proceed through the gospel, how to ‘see’ the signs, and how to ‘follow’ Jesus.

Jesus and the 2 Esdras Parallels

How does Jesus come to the knowledge that *he* is the one to challenge the establishment and herald the dawning of a new era for Israel? There is a potential answer within the profound parallels of 2 Esdras; in fact, I will go as far as to suggest 2 Esdras is, at least partially, another record of the trials and tribulations of Jesus, and that this account is either a first-hand testament written by Jesus himself, or another, perhaps slightly earlier rendition of the FG, written by the same gospel author. It may, indeed, be a united effort, for it bears the same stamp of ambiguity inherent in the FG, where one identification suits two people, or places, etc., and the distinction between

the protagonist and the author is intentionally made unclear.

Take a look at the following list of *selected* parallels (there are many more than Christian exegetes suggest) between 2 Esdras and the FG (including some concepts retained in Luke's gospel). The similarities are astounding, if we are to take them as coincidental. (Naturally, most of the FG scenarios have yet to be explained but you can refer back to this list once you have finished reading the book and verify what I suggest.)

2 Esdras	Jesus Story
"The word of the Lord that came to Ezra son of Chusi"	The only similar name in the NT is in Luke 8:3, where Chuza is a "steward" of the king; cf. the "royal official" (John 4:46). Lazarus (FG) is the son of the royal official
The story opens with an allusion to the wandering in the wilderness and the lack of appreciation for the Promised Land	The FG opens with a symbolic parallel to the wilderness, the entry into the Promised Land, and the corruption of the covenant
The author is called Salathiel ("I have asked of God") and/or Ezra ("help")	Luke's genealogy of Jesus includes a "Salathiel." Jesus claims to have spoken to the Father. Lazarus becomes "one who is helped" (by Jesus) and one who helps (as the <i>parakletos</i>); both Lazarus and Jesus have echoes of Ezra, reflecting FG ambiguity
Salathiel begins his mission thirty years after the "destruction of the city"	In Luke, Jesus' age at the beginning of his mission is "about thirty"
He disappears for forty days and nights before beginning his work	In the Synoptics, Jesus spends forty days/nights in the desert before beginning his work
Children of the Father	Children of the Father
A certain "chief of the people" comes to Salathiel/Ezra, at night; his name is Phaltiel, meaning "deliverance of God"	Nicodemus (meaning "victor for the people," teacher, or leader) comes to Jesus by night
"Recently, you also laid hands on me, crying out before the judge's seat for him	John 19

to deliver me to you, and you delivered me to death by hanging on the tree”

“if I have not done the things my Father commanded, I will contend in judgement with you”

John 5:36–8; 18:19–23, etc.

“they do not see me with bodily eyes, yet with the spirit they will believe the things I have said”

“Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have come to believe”

“And I will raise up the dead from their places, and bring them out from their tombs, because I recognise my name in them”

The “raising” of Lazarus

“I will send you help”

The *parakletos*; general concept of healing the nation; help in the ‘storm’; Lazarus’ name implies help

Consecrated twelve

Twelve disciples/ministers

“Not one of the servants whom I have given you will perish”

John 17:6f

“Remember your children that sleep”

Jesus’ adopted ‘son’ Lazarus is (symbolically, as Israel) “sleeping”

“When I came to them they rejected me”

Self-explanatory

“Wait for your shepherd”

John 10:1–18

A “perpetual light” will shine on the righteous.

“...the light of the world...of life.”

The converted are robed in white

John 4:35; 20:12

On Mount Zion: those “who have put off mortal clothing and have put on the immortal, and have confessed the name of God” are “crowned, and receive palms”

Jesus returns in triumph; followers hail him with palms

Many “wonders” have been seen (cf. 9:6)

“Unless you see signs and wonders”

“My spirit was greatly agitated”

John 11:33

“...what was good departed”	The Remnant concept
“...you raised up for yourself a servant”	Jesus as servant / Israel ‘lifted up’
“You may find individuals who have kept your commandments, but nations you will never find”	Nathanael (the Remnant)
Uriel/Ezra discussion	Jesus/Nicodemus discussion
Sowing, reaping, harvesting; evil must pass away before good can come, etc.	John 4:35f; 12:24f
“Stand at my right side, and I will show you the interpretation”	Lazarus is at Jesus’ right side, and is privy to ‘secret’ knowledge
“And one shall reign whom [they] do not expect”	John 1:26, 8:48f, 19:5, etc.
“...do you not know that Israel has been entrusted to you in the land of their exile?”	Nazareth = Arzareth
“...do not forsake us, like a shepherd who leaves the flock in the power of savage wolves”	John 10:12
A seven-day confinement	Lazarus and disciples undergo seven-day confinements
The “chosen vine”	“I am the vine”
“...one dove”	John 1:32
“...this people whom you have loved”	Lazarus/Israel (“the one whom Jesus loves”)
“...why have you handed the one over to the many ...?” (and read on)	Martha questions Jesus’ decision to let Lazarus ‘die’ (it is the will of God)
God visits his creation / the ‘plan’ is prepared before Time / see note regarding Son of Man	Son of Man
“Jacob is the beginning of the age that follows”	Abraham’s children, the ‘house of Jacob’; the firstborn, and the rightful

	heir
"...when the humiliation of Zion is complete"	Storming of the temple, conversion of priests and Pharisees, triumphal entry, seat over the stone pavement
"...corruption shall be overcome"	"I have conquered the world"
"...greater things than these"	"...greater things than these"
Ezra is granted this insight because God has seen the 'purity' he has maintained from his youth	Jesus' purity debated; there is no deceit in Nathanael, or the Remnant
"As for the other nations that have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing ... they are like spittle"	Blind man washes away 'world' by washing off the dust and spittle
"...how will the heir receive the inheritance unless by passing through the appointed danger?" / "unless the living pass through the difficult ... experiences, they can never receive those things that have been reserved for them"	Lazarus, Mary and Jesus all have to undergo great tribulation before the 'kingdom' can be inaugurated
The disobedient do not perform God's 'works'	Jesus does the 'works' of the Father; Peter does not
The time will come, when the city ('bride') "that now is not seen shall appear, and the land that is now hidden shall be disclosed"	"...the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem"
"...to you alone I have shown these things"	The secrecy between Jesus and Lazarus/Nicodemus
"...who among the living is there that has not sinned?"	"Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone"
"...the Most High has made not one world, but two"	Throughout the FG, Jesus alludes to the duality of existence (good and evil, light and darkness, above/earth, flesh/spirit, etc.); also, John 19:36

Honour God's name

John 12:28

The seven blessings of the righteous after death, including glorification, inheritance, faces that shine "like the sun"

Lazarus' seventh sign is for the glorification of Jesus and God, it is the culmination of the uniting of the tribes and the reinstatement of the 'rightful heir'; his face is covered with a veil to suggest a shining face

The righteous dead will have freedom for seven days in order to witness what has happened

Jesus flees to Shiloh after the crucifixion, in order to inaugurate the new order; his period of purification lasts seven days

The "righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly, or to entreat the Most High for them—fathers for sons"

Martha believes Jesus can intercede for Lazarus, his 'son'

The 'contest' of choosing 'life' over 'death' (cf. 8:56)

John 3:19–21; 18:40

The "world to come [is] for the sake of only a few"

Throughout the FG this is a running theme. Only those who hear Jesus' 'voice', 'see' the signs, etc., get to enter the new Promised Land

Ezra is "taken up" from humankind after his mission is complete

Jesus retreats and then expects to go to the Father after his mission is complete

Ezra humbles himself / compared to those who "walk in great pride"

The story of Lazarus and Peter

For the righteous, "paradise is opened"

"...under the fig tree"

"...illness is banished... death is hidden"

Lazarus and Jesus 'conquer' both

God saved and laboured over the Remnant

Jesus tells the disciples that they are benefiting from "others' labour" / the Samaritans are part of the Remnant

The vision of the mourning woman

John 11

The vision of the temple being destroyed and the raising of a divine 'city' in its place

John 2:13–22 (and the raising of Lazarus, etc.)

“Stand up like a man, and I will instruct you”	The lame man is told to get up
“...you have been called to be with the Most High as few have been”	“The Father and I are one”; calling of the twelve, and “the one”
“Twelve kings shall reign,” each of equal duration	The ‘twelve’ are to be equal (foot-washing and Peter’s story in the FG epilogue)
The Messiah ben David will come later, at the end of days	Jesus is not the Messiah ben David (cf. John 7:41–3)
“judgement seat”	“judgement seat”
The man from the sea	John 6:16–21
“...carved out for himself a great mountain” but the place from which it is carved cannot be seen	Shiloh is Jesus’ ‘holy mountain’; it cannot be ‘seen’ because it isn’t a physical mountain but a symbolic one
A violent crowd gathers against him; many are killed	Jesus’ group is attacked by Pilate’s men (Samaritan tumult)
He comes down from the mountain with a “peaceable” crowd	Shiloh means ‘peaceable’
Where he is, is a site of worship	Jesus establishes the ‘house of God’ at Shiloh
This figurehead is sent to “direct those that are left”	Jesus the ‘shepherd,’ the ‘way,’ etc., for the Remnant
This figure is the “Son of God”	Jesus is the “Son of God”
He shall declare the iniquities of the world from Mount Zion	Jesus begins his tirade against the world from the temple and does so repeatedly
The “nine tribes” are in Arzareth	Jesus is “of Nazareth”; the northern (scattered) tribes are in ‘limbo’
No one can see the “Son” until his hour comes	Many do not ‘see’ Jesus; his ‘hour’ is anticipated throughout the narrative

“On the third day”

“On the third day”

“...the age is divided into twelve parts, and nine ... have already passed”

“Twelve hours of daylight ... night is coming...”

Ezra is “lying there like a corpse” because a vision has confounded him; he seeks understanding and is subsequently ‘raised’

Lazarus is ‘sick,’ imprisoned, and metaphorically ‘dead’; Jesus rescues him and he rises a new priest

Darkness vs. light

Darkness vs. light

“...send the holy spirit into me”

Jesus receives the Holy Spirit

Secret teachings for the ‘wise’ are the “fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge”

Jesus confides certain mysteries to his chosen ones, and the gospel itself tells a secret

The concept of Jesus’ own enlightenment before his mission in Judea and Israel does seem logical. On the basis that 2 Esdras is, in fact, a parallel tale of our man, Jesus, I suggest that we can glean a rationale for Jesus’ mid-life compulsion to stir up trouble in Jerusalem from the explanation provided in 2 Esd 3:28–36. Having spent thirty years travelling the world (just the period of ‘missing years’ scholars are so intent on explaining), Salathiel begins to realise that the rest of the nations seem to do very well, in a materialistic sense, even though they are unmindful of the commandments. He questions the long-believed in supremacy of (the Jerusalem-based) Israel and its unique relationship with the divine because the nation has failed so dismally in its attempt to attain, or retain, the Promised Land ideal. In other words: If God’s way is so fickle as to allow his chosen people to fall into despair, while the ungodly foreigners seem to reap all the rewards, how can anyone hope to comprehend, and follow, the path to righteousness?

As he lies on his bed one night, so Salathiel describes (2 Esd 3:1), his emotions get the better of him, and he demands explanation. The ensuing text reveals how he is granted enlightenment and this forms the very foundation for the parallel discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus in the FG. Salathiel (Ezra) is convinced by one wiser than himself (the angel, Uriel), that the salvation of Israel lies in the advent of one who will bring the ‘secret knowledge’ (cf. 8:62) of the divine will back to the devout Israelites. The visions of a man going up a mountain, coming out of the sea, etc., are visions of his own future (albeit with the benefit of hindsight); these, too, are episodes depicted in the FG.

Salathiel is called to Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai

(where Elijah is also to be found, in 1 Kgs 19:8), from which he is ordered by God to ‘go to Israel’ (2:33), e.g., as the new Moses. As we have already seen, in the gospel, Jesus is formally commissioned in the shadow of Mount Nebo, where Moses dies, having passed on the office to Joshua.

It is perfectly feasible that Salathiel, our Jesus, leaves Palestine (for whatever reason) while still quite young, and travels. The more he sees, the more he thinks of his homeland, his people, and his heritage. He returns with knowledge few of his peers can match (“How does this man have such learning ...?” John 7:15), and a zeal for the revivification of Israel, i.e., the cultural inheritance of his forefathers.

So, it may be that Jesus, just like Moses before him, finds himself in a foreign land, under the patronage of an advisor (e.g., a Jethro-figure), a guru; he perceives things his peers back in Palestine have no hope of perceiving, being so close to the cause of the problem for an objective understanding. His passion for God and for the apparently forgotten roots of the Israelite religion leads him back to the land of his birth and the people of his blood. Jesus believes he has been sent from God for a purpose—to return his people to the Promised Land, once and for all, and to return the crown to the sons of Joseph.

In Luke’s genealogy for Jesus, which contains the significant FG names of Joseph, Joshua, Eliezer, Melchi (i.e., Melchizedek), is also the unusual name Salathiel (Shealtiel in the NRSV). If Matthew’s account was already in circulation, why would Luke choose to vary the lineage so greatly? There is no logical means by which he could have discovered Jesus’ lineage after 70 CE (when most records were destroyed), so I think the only feasible answer is that Luke was influenced by the FG and/or the 2 Esdras legacy.

The second and third stages of Nicodemus’ story (John 7 and 19) will be explored at the appropriate junctures.

Raising the Son of Man

The “son of man” phrase occurs in the OT, in one or other of its variant forms, one hundred and seven times. In most instances it refers to humans in a generic sense, either in the singular or the plural. Obviously, this is not the easiest of topics to discuss briefly but, once I uncovered what seemed to me to be the overall gist of the FG’s message, and realised the context into which the “son of man” phrase is set, I returned to the OT precedents to see if anything in particular stood out.

In the Greek FG, the phrase in John 3:13 is ambiguous and doesn’t appear as an obvious title as it does in the English versions, where the ‘S’ and the ‘M’ are capitalized (again, a Christian practice, to show respect for

what is perceived to be a pseudonym for Jesus). The literal translation of the Greek is actually “the son of the man” or, “the man’s son.” This becomes a clue, in fact, to the identity of a significant character later in the narrative, so it is important to recognise this subtle distinction.

My search for a precedent to suit Jesus’ apparent usage of the phrase led me to this, taken from a direct translation of the Hebrew text: “O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! ... let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, upon the son of man whom you made strong for yourself” (Ps 80:1, 17). The Hebrew term for “right hand” is *yamin*; some commentators hazard a guess that a potential allusion to Benjamin may exist here (which is itself translated as “son of the right hand”), but no further explanation is offered. Benjamin, of course, is one of the tribes to head southward to Jerusalem after the Sinai schism, along with Judah (hence, “Benjamin” can also be translated as “man of the south”). The son of Jacob, Benjamin, is not only the youngest, he is said to have been born in Canaan; he is falsely incriminated and imprisoned (for theft) but proves to be Joseph’s favourite brother and is exonerated. The midrashic Book of Jasher suggests Benjamin and Joseph shared secret knowledge. We soon discover that the disciple symbolically linked to the tribe Benjamin is none other than Jesus’ right-hand-man. Coincidences?

There is more to Psalm 80 that proves germane to our interpretation of the FG; it is a song praising the stalwart nature of the “vine” God had taken “out of Egypt” (in Jer 6:9 the ‘vine’ is equated with the Remnant). Despite the humiliation and degradation at the hands of its neighbours and the threat of extinction, this vine remains hopeful of some future restoration. The Hebrew word first used for “man” is *’iysh*, which is a formal or dignified term that is often used to denote a ‘house’ (i.e., a hereditary lineage), family, etc.; it is, effectively, a collective plural. As Joseph is likened to a “flock,” we can conclude that the vine being referred to is the Remnant of the house of Joseph (see 2 Chr 34:9).

The “son of man” phrase is, in its Hebrew form, *ben ’adam* and this signifies an individual, a human being. It appears in the Manual of Discipline (DSS) as “one born of a woman.” In the blessings of Jacob, it is Joseph who is depicted as the strong one, the one made “agile” and the one “helped” by God; it is Joseph who receives God’s blessings on his head (Gen. 49:22f). It is also Joseph, this younger brother, who receives the special robe from his father, *not* the actual firstborn, who *normally* would have inherited this honour, as Deut 21:16 stipulates.

The placing of the right hand of God upon this representative indicates forgiveness and sanction. That the person/group is already situated on the ‘right’ side signifies a prominent and authoritative position; they were once ‘made strong’ by God for *himself*. This is an apt description of Ephraim, the

firstborn of Joseph (Jer 31:9), God's *beloved* son whom he "taught to walk" (Hos 11:3):

When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. "Not so, my Father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head."

Gen 48:17–18

Echoing his father's unconventional rise in status, Ephraim effectively becomes the firstborn in the eyes of Jacob, and of God. Ephraim's strength, however, has since been "devoured" by foreigners (Hos 7:7), and it is *this* concept that lays the foundation for the ensuing FG narrative.

*...for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

Jer 31:9

In John 15:1–6, Jesus declares that *he* is "the vine"; he actually makes, in v.6, a clear reference to Ps 80:16, e.g., the branches of the vine will be cut down, gathered and burned, if the chosen do not follow him—reference, that is, to the long beleaguered house of Joseph. In other words, *now* is the time for the Remnant to make itself strong again, or it must resign itself to extinction.

In comparison, the wicked tenants of the parable in Luke 20:9f and Gospel of Thomas 65, the evil shepherds of John 10, and the 'unsound' grapevine of Gospel of Thomas 40, all seem to refer to the corrupt, Pharisee-ruled, priestly establishment of Jerusalem. They resent the coming (or return) of the rightful heir and plot to kill the "son" of the "landlord" in order to keep their ill-gotten inheritance. The return of the northern Remnant, remember, restores Ephraim (and thus, the house of Joseph) to the position of firstborn, and there are many with vested interests who would not wish to see this become the case. In Ps 78:67–8 the boasting of Judah is explicit: God rejected the "tent of Joseph" and "chose the tribe of Judah" as his "sanctuary." This is pure (and common) Davidic propaganda.

The raising of the "son of man" in the FG, then, has a dual implication, just as in the precedent. It suggests the rise of the Remnant of the house of Joseph, the true Israel (see 2 Esd. 16:74: "my elect ones") but also, the raising of an individual. In its general context, the "son of man" must be lifted up in a sense that evokes the meaning of Moses' raising of the Nehushtan (Num 21:4f). In both Numbers 21 and the FG, the fundamental theme is the reconfirmation of the power of God. Just as God and his people triumphed over the Egyptians, so the Nehushtan, in the former instance,

stands as a reminder that even in a spiritual “wilderness,” where temptations abound, the saving power of God is there for all who seek it out. It is a beacon of salvation.

... lift up an ensign over the peoples ... see, your salvation comes.

Isa 62:10–11

I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.

Ezek 12:6

A son of man must be raised up and set before the nation as a sign by which others may see the way to an everlasting ‘life’. Where the alternative is a spiritual death under the influence of contemporaneous “serpents” (i.e., the Pharisees, and the corrupt cultus), Jesus, as the divinely sanctioned agent for Israel, offers himself, and “those given” to him, as the new Nehushtan, the righteous, pre-ordained alternative. The “son of man” symbolism is linked to Nicodemus’ scene because the one to be ‘raised’ is intimately associated with him, i.e., it is *not* Jesus.

6

THE MEETING AT QUMRAN

Aenon near Salim

JESUS BAPTISES AT THE SITE CALLED Aenon near Salim (John 3:23). Most modern scholars place the two sites where Eusebius suggested, about nine or ten miles south of Scythopolis, on the western banks of the Jordan. Others place them nearer to Shechem, with Aenon at the Wadi Far ‘ah, and Salim some ten miles away. I suggest there is an alternative understanding of the name.

From the Hebrew, the name Aenon derives from *’ayin*, meaning “eye,” figuratively understood to mean “fountain or spring” (e.g., as the focal spot of a landscape, etc.) and this is usually how it is translated. From the Greek, however, it comes from the word *aineo*, “to praise.” “Salim” echoes the name Salem, the city commonly identified with Jerusalem, from which Melchizedek came to meet Abraham in the desert (Genesis 14); John 3:22 states that the site is in Judea. One of the most ancient sources of a reference to Jerusalem is the collection of Amarna Letters (c. fourteenth-century BCE letters from foreign rulers that include many details on Canaan and the Hebrews’ entry and settlement there), where it is referred to as Urusalim. In Assyrian texts there is a similar spelling of Urusalimmu. There may be an intended play on the Hebrew word, *shalem*, which means “to make ready, to complete, restore,” etc., but scholars have a difficult time accepting the shift from the ‘s’ sound to the ‘sh’; there is also an inherent meaning of “peace,” where *shalom* is inferred, making Jerusalem, traditionally, the “city of peace” (which, despite the ‘sh’, is seldom debated).

The word used in the Greek text of John 3:23 to denote “near” is *engus*, which has the connotation of being ready, being at hand. The ordinary application of “near” (proximity), such as in John 4:5 (“Sychar, near the plot of ground ...”), uses *plesion*; the reader is thus intended to interpret *engus* as being not only (necessarily) physically near but also, strategically ‘ready’.

The three words taken together offer an interesting picture of where John and his disciples are in John 3:

Aenon + near + Salim

The place of praise + ready + Jerusalem / restored

Or: The place of praise which is ready for the restored Jerusalem

Other information comes from John 3:23, i.e., “water was abundant there”; if we take Salim to be a possible play on the Greek term *saleuo*, which means, “to destroy, disturb by shaking,” this would suggest something to do with an earthquake. Earthquakes are rarely mentioned in the OT and are usually described in fairly generic terms as a punishment of God, or a sign of his presence, etc. They are, however, fairly common in Palestine and a few extremely damaging ones have been recorded in sources external to the Bible; there is *one* specific biblical source, however, i.e., Amos 1:1, in which an earthquake is mentioned in a historical context. The prophet Amos, who is also sent to warn the Samaritans that the time has come for them to return to God, is given his message from God at Jerusalem, “two years before the earthquake.” This only precedent (cf. Joel 4:16) is thus a historical account of a physical phenomenon and is directly associated with the vicinity around Jerusalem. There is only one place that we know of that fits these various elements: the place we now refer to as Qumran.

Qumran is a place of worship (praise), whose inhabitants see themselves as the elect few who are prepared for the day when Jerusalem will be purified. Here we find copious supplies of water, specifically for cleansing rituals, etc., but there is also the Wadi Salim only six miles north-east of Jerusalem, lying between the city and the Dead Sea. To complete the picture, Qumran has previously been abandoned due to an earthquake, probably the one in 31 BCE that is well attested.

It would seem that Jesus has approached the sect *at* Qumran; he has taken it upon himself to emulate John, who is now back in his own territory. Is this a challenge? It certainly is not a peaceful joining of forces to ensure a mutually satisfactory outcome, for there is a degree of antagonism in the narrative, a sense of resentment and/or imminent rejection even.

In John 3:25f, there is a debate taking place concerning purification, specifically the level of purity Jesus can claim in taking on the role of baptiser (3:26). This purification theme echoes the description of the six jars of purification water at the wedding; we are invited to make the connection. The Manual of Discipline (DSS) specifies that there must be a complete submission of the soul to the will of God before the waters of purification can sanctify the individual; the water itself symbolises the conferring of the “spirit of truth.” One intriguing rule is emphasized, though: No one can use baptism to assume the purity of holy men. This would seem to be the crux

of the debate concerning Jesus.¹

*O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness
so that you may be saved.
Jer. 4:14*

Bridegroom

John, in the context of ritual cleansing, attempts to quell the debate on purification by launching into a strange analogy of the bride and bridegroom; what is the connection? There must be two sides to the argument; *presumably*, the disciples are defending Jesus' purity, and the Jew is questioning it (at least, that is how the FG preserves the event but I have more to say on this) but why is this emissary from Jerusalem concerned with Jesus' purity at all? Jesus has made his intentions known to the priesthood in Jerusalem; he has declared that he is going to see the current order destroyed and a new one rise in its place. People are already converting to his way of thinking, so the emissaries are in pursuit, in order to learn more about this man's credentials.

Priests according to law, do the ritualistic cleansing of anything, e.g., people, temple, etc. John *is* a priest, but Jesus? Remember that the Jews claim to 'know' Jesus' genealogy; at some stage they must have checked him out (it isn't until John 6:42 that they reveal they have done this). *Records are scrutinized if anyone claims descent from the priestly families* (see Neh 7:64), so judging from their reaction, Jesus obviously doesn't meet the criteria. What right *does* he have to act this way? John's intercession is profound and damning: "No one can be given anything except what has been given from heaven" (John 3:27), he begins, referring of course to Jesus' earlier election as God's representative (the hand of God, remember, symbolically coming to rest on his head [as the 'dove'], granting him authority, e.g., "I have put my spirit upon him" [Isa 42:1]).

Such a granting of authority and the debatable level of purity for the role, echoes Isaiah 6, which tells of the prophet being chosen to give the people of Israel a message. Isaiah questions his own suitability for the job, suggesting that he is not pure enough to speak the word of God; a seraph (a winged creature; cf. 'dove') brings a burning coal from the altar and touches his lips, both purging his guilt and conferring on him his commission. He is then told to go to the people and to tell them that they must *close their eyes*

¹ Note how John 3:22 states Jesus "baptised" but in 4:2, which is clearly a later addendum, this is contradicted, claiming it was not he who baptised, but his disciples. I suggest this is a direct reaction to the purity debate, i.e., the "Jew(s)" consider that Jesus, as a man of history (not a divine entity) cannot be seen to assume the purity of John, the priest, especially as he is a Samaritan.

and ears, e.g., to the iniquitous world and turn their hearts back to God, who will save (heal) them. This is precisely what Jesus has to (and will) do.

In the presence of the Jew, John *apparently* reconfirms Jesus' commission and at the same time he rails against the ineptitude and illegitimacy of the present cultus, the representative of which is standing right there, i.e., *it* has not received authority from heaven. This endorsement of Jesus at such an early stage in the mission, however, is valuable propaganda for the FG author but notice how rapidly John disappears from the story.

To John, Jesus is the "bridegroom" because he *seems to be* the authorized, sanctified high priest of God, come to restore Israel to her rightful place at God's side. John must retreat, so that Jesus can take over, so the gospel suggests. John's rejoicing over the bridegroom in turn echoes the sentiment of Isa 62:5, where the bridegroom rejoices over the bride and God then rejoices over Israel. We are led to suppose that this pattern will be followed, progressing from the bridegroom's friend, to the groom, to God, with the ultimate effect being restored relations between God and Israel (the sentiments expressed in the marriage ceremony).

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God ... he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels.

Isa 61:1–2, 10

This is fighting talk to any security-minded informer who may be listening; a coup must be in the works, a challenge to the *status quo*. That the information gets back to the Pharisees is no surprise; their appeasement policy helps keep Jerusalem in bondage to the Romans but if they can be of any assistance in quelling a potential uprising, the better for them.

John, remember, claims not to know Jesus; he claims someone told him to baptise, told him to authenticate 'the one on whom the Spirit landed'; his initial ratification of Jesus' mission, we shall see, is short-lived. The overwhelming aftermath of Jesus' visit to Qumran is ultimately detrimental.

7

SAMARITAN WOMAN

ISRAEL IS IN A SORRY STATE when Jesus begins his mission. In the cycle of events prescribed in Ezekiel 16 for the divine bride, the nation is currently in a state corresponding to that of *infidelity*. The very next scene in the FG, not surprisingly, is the story of the woman with many ex-husbands *and* a current lover!

Sychar

Jesus and the disciples are said to travel from Aenon near Salim to Galilee, through Samaria (John 4:3–4), apparently following in the footsteps of Joseph in Gen 37:13–15. Instead of arriving at Shechem, however, they come to a place called Sychar, around which there is much debate concerning its possible identification with, or distinction from, Shechem. Most interpreters tend to identify Sychar with Shechem because it is akin to the Hebrew word *cakar*, which can mean “purchase,” and to *karah*, which is more specifically the purchase of land; this is justified by the fact that Jacob purchases a plot of land from Shechem’s father (Gen 33:19).

Shechem is significant for other reasons, however, e.g., it is where Jacob erects an altar to the God of Israel; Joseph’s bones are buried there (Josh. 24:32); and it is the site of the renewal of the covenant in Joshua 24. It is the location of the blessings and the curses, according to the Law of Moses (Deut 11:29, 27:11f), and in the allocation of territory, it is given to ‘the house of Joseph’ (Joshua 16). It is this affiliation through Jacob to the house of Joseph that John 4:5 makes clear but we are told only that Sychar is ‘*near*’ this plot of land, i.e., ‘*near*’ as in physical proximity (not ‘*readiness*’, as in “near Salim”). Besides, the tale of Shechem in Genesis 37 is one of the incarceration of Joseph (in a dried out well) by his brothers; this negative imagery, though germane to later episodes in the FG, is not what is required or intended at this point in the narrative. The current scenario is ultimately positive and hopeful, so although the site may indeed allude to Josephite territory, and to important cultural precedents, the name

“Shechem” is purposefully avoided and Sychar is inserted to provide further theological impetus.

In attempting to decipher the symbolic significance of this specific place name, taking into consideration any possible corruptions but assuming the original was never explicitly written as “Shechem,”¹ we must see if there are any other biblical words, apart from *cakar*, that could be the subject of allusion. I offer the following suggestions:

Shachar (verb): Meaning “to go about a task early; to seek, enquire, etc., diligently”—the woman is at the well early, and the first thing she does is ask Jesus a question. This term is used in Pss 63:1, 78:1, and Prov 1:28, 8:17, in the context of searching for God. In Hos 5:15, however, it is used in a direct diatribe against the illicit practices of both Judah and Ephraim. God is the one saying, “I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face.” What Jesus is about to do and say reflects this sentiment.

shekar (noun) / shakar (verb): Meaning “strong drink / drunkard; “to be intoxicated.” In John 2, Jesus is presenting himself to an intoxicated world, a world in which the inhabitants have been seduced by cheap wine but have remained parched. The concept is used first in Lev 10:9, where the priesthood is warned not to drink before entering the tent of meeting. From Num 6:3 (regarding Nazarites), to Mic 2:11, it is employed almost exclusively in a pejorative sense.

Ephraim is full of “drunkards” (Isa 28:1), so we are led to believe, and this has made it weak (Hos 7:7). Hellenism, foreign idolatry, kingship, illegal marriages, etc., have all seduced God’s children away from their birthright, away from the clear path to, and promised position with, God. The northern tribes, whose assimilation with the indigenous peoples of Samaria has brought nothing but damnation from their southern relatives, are seen in Hosea’s passionate verses as the “prostitute” (9:1), the whore who has “bargained for lovers” (8:9) and has broken the covenant with God (see Isa 1:21; 57:8 and Jer 3:1).

Still, there is another potential allusion to be recognised, here. Joshua

¹ The only other mention of Shechem in the NT is in Acts 7:16 and this is in its Greek form, Sychem. The ancient Greek manuscript evidence for Sychar, on the other hand, is overwhelming. Only the Sinaitic and Syriac translations of the FG employ Sychem for John 4:5.

(son of Nun) is buried at a place called Timnath-serah (Josh 24:30) in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Ga'ash, i.e., in his *own* territory from within the lands of the Israelites (19:50). The burial site is referred to in the LXX, however, as *Thamnasa-char* (Gk). Mount Ga'ash has never been located; the name appears first in the Book of Joshua (and then in Judg 2:9, 2 Sam 23:30, and 1 Chr 11:32) in connection with a torrent, or wadi. The word *ga'ash* is commonly translated as “earthquake” but is more of an agitation, a troubling or stirring up of something, rather than a trembling earth. It may be a play on *ga'al*, and/or *ga'ar*, both of which have negative connotations (“to reject or rebuke”). On the other hand, “Gerizim” means “to cut off”; all these terms suggest an upheaval, a change, an agitation. Is Mount Ga'ash the same as Mount Gerizim? As the hill country extends all the way up to include Shechem (Josh 20:7), the site may lie very close to Sychar. The wadi (a tributary of the Jordan is close by) is, perhaps, that which supplies Jacob's Well.

We can glean more information from Timnath-serah:

***Timnath*:** Meaning “portion assigned” or “manifestation.”

***serah/cerach*:** Often translated as “overhanging,” and thus taken literally to mean that the town was on the edge of a steep declivity; however, it generally refers to something that extends, or is in excess and thus suggests the possibility of a “remnant.”

This creates a very interesting possibility:

Timnath + Serah/Cerach

portion/manifestation (of the) Remnant

Joshua saw himself (and his people) as the Remnant of Joseph and this was *his* land, *his* ‘portion’. Jesus’ mission is to restore the ‘portion’ to its rightful owners, i.e., the Remnant.

So, Sychar is probably Timnathsachar/cerach, the burial place of Joshua, Jesus’ namesake, north of Mount Gerizim, *near* Shechem.

The Virgin Harlot

Jesus happens upon this supposedly shameless woman at Jacob's Well. The introduction of a well/water scenario allows for Jesus to offer himself as the bearer of a satiating alternative, e.g., “With joy you will draw water from the

wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3), echoing the overflowing water at the wedding in Cana but there is much more to this scene than meets the eye!

In both Genesis 24 and 29, there is a basic thematic structure: A man arrives at a well; he meets a woman; there is a discussion concerning the water of the well; there follows a discussion concerning ‘kin’ and marriage; the woman runs home to tell her people; the man stays with his new found family for a time. In Genesis 29 the man marries the woman at the well but in Genesis 24, the woman follows the servant *to* her future husband.

The Samaritan woman is at the well at about “noon” or, in the Greek, “about the sixth hour.” In the explained reckoning of time, however, this “sixth hour” (one of the designated “hours”) runs from 9 A.M. to 12 midday, so it is, generally speaking, morning. In Genesis 24, Abraham’s servant arrives at the well “toward evening,” while in Genesis 29, Jacob arrives in “broad daylight.” It is the echo of this latter scene to which the “sixth hour” time frame, and the explicit mentioning of Jacob in the FG alludes; it is a signal for us to return to the precedent for further insight (there is no other biblical precedent for “Jacob’s Well” than this).

Jacob is advised that the sheep cannot be watered until “all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well” (Gen 29:7–8). This is a very cryptic clue, employed in the FG as an allusion to the culmination of Jesus’ mission and which you will only appreciate much *later* in the gospel’s narrative but it makes the symbolic allusion to Genesis 29 very strong indeed. From Genesis 24, on the other hand, are almost verbatim repetitions of dialogue in the request for a drink of water and the refusal to eat until Jesus has completed the work he has been sent to do. There is also a similar testing of the woman concerned; the servant in Genesis 24 decides that the woman who gives him a drink *and* offers to water his camels will be the one he will choose to be the wife of Isaac, his master’s son.

Jesus sets up the Samaritan woman for a ‘test’ by telling her to fetch her “husband”; if she is a “virgin, whom no man [has] known” (Gen 24:16), she can become a suitable wife. Her first response, as Rebekah’s in the precedent, is to confirm the man’s expectations, i.e., she has no husband. This becomes the basis for another theological expression of intent in the FG. The woman at Sychar has no husband, yet she has known many “husbands,” i.e., five, in fact.² It is clear that this character is now a

² In the story of Tobit, the man from Naphtali, there is a woman by the name of Sarah who is said to have had seven husbands, though she remains a virgin, for each of them has died before she ‘took on their name’ in the ‘bed chamber’. This is not the only parallel between Tobit and the FG, for there is also a blindness that is miraculously cured, a wedding feast, emphasis on heritage and remnant, and the testing of the young couple by an angel. Tobit, like the FG author, is also

representative of Samaria, just as Nathanael is the representative of the Remnant, and Nicodemus of the Pharisees.

Originally, I interpreted the number five in light of 2 Kgs 17:24f, where, after the mass deportation by the Assyrians, Samaritan Israelites are assimilated with peoples from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim. A marriage of thought and of culture ensued which was officiated, or supervised, by an Israelite (Samaritan) priest, and because of this apparent sanctification, the idea of Yahweh as “husband” during this time *seems to be* compatible. The current immigrant into Samaria, who is *not* considered a husband, for there is no marriage, would then be Rome. This union is *not* sanctified by the legitimate priests of, and therefore cannot include, God.

Then I asked myself, would *this* Jesus, a man so devoted to returning Israel to its original priestly and exalted state, truly consider these foreigners as husbands? Is this in keeping with the FG’s perception of the bride/groom, and does it truly tally with the concept of Ezekiel’s Bride of God idea? In the end, I had to say no. It would also make the subsequent statement, concerning the worship on the mountain, a *non sequitur*. The two concepts must be linked and they must result in Jesus’ being able to declare himself the ‘one’ who is expected. So, let’s try something else.

When Jesus first arrives, from the south, he is recognised as a Jew (the “you” in 4:20 is plural, indicating that the woman perceives Jesus as a representative of the Jews) but in Jerusalem he is referred to as a Samaritan. Like Nathanael, though, who bases his declaration that Jesus is “the Son of God” and the “King of Israel” on the concept of a *future* restoration (the fig tree idea), so the woman is convinced Jesus is Samaritan (a northerner) *only* when he makes a similar, cryptic declaration to *her* concerning her husbands and, in an *apparent* shift in thought, the *future* concept of worship. It is almost as if Jesus is using key words, secret passwords that define him as a fellow subversive, like a cautious member of a resistance community.

The Samaritan messiah, whom the woman anticipates, is to re-establish worship on Mount Gerizim, yet there seems to be a contradiction of this in the well scene of John 4:19–24. The woman declares that her ancestors worshipped on this mountain but Jesus tells her that there will come a day when the Father will be worshipped *neither* on this mountain *nor* in Jerusalem! How can this be?

Jesus goes on to suggest that the Samaritans worship what they don’t know and that he and his disciples worship what they do know, isolating the Jews, yet again, as the source from which salvation comes. Hang on ... isn’t

commissioned with the writing of a testament to the deeds/words of God. This warrants far more attention than I can provide here.

Jesus *opposed* to the Jews? Why then, are they seen as the means to salvation? If we say that Jesus must be referring to the original concept of the pure and devout (united) Israel being the means of salvation for the rest of the world, then why doesn't he say this, instead of singling out the Jews, who are so obviously the antagonists of the FG?

Remember, as far as Jesus is concerned, Samaria is currently in a state of divorce from God; it is full of 'drunkards' that no longer remember how to worship properly (the sentiment in Amos, too). Jesus needs to bring them back to their roots. The ancestors the woman mentions are, I think, her relatively *recent* ancestors, who worshipped on Mount Gerizim when a temple stood there, between c. 330 BCE and 128 BCE (when it was destroyed by John Hyrcanus, the Jewish high priest). This is why Jesus says she worships what she does not know, i.e., she doesn't know the *true* religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and thus worships falsely.

The Samaritan woman, in her role as the representative of Samaria, *has* had five (metaphorical) husbands, five true loci of worship to the god of Abraham:

1. **Bethel**, the sacred site of Abraham and Jacob (though once in Benjamin territory, it became Ephraimite soon after).
2. **Shechem**, the site of Jacob's altar (Gen 33:1 –20).
3. **Gilgal**, which is the site of Joshua's circle of twelve stones and the circumcision of the Israelites; a holy sanctuary of northern Israel in 1 Sam 15:33; Amos 4:4, 5:5; Ho. 9:15, etc.
4. **Mount Ebal**, where Joshua sets up his altar (Josh 8:30f) and there writes the law on stones while in the presence of both the Israelites and their sacrificial offerings.
5. The fifth, and last locus of worship, is **Shiloh**, where, throughout the history of the Books of Joshua and Judges, the tabernacle is established. It is from Shiloh that the Ark of the Covenant is taken by the Philistines (1 Sam 4:5f). It never returns to the territory of Israel but is eventually sent to Jerusalem.

The woman responds to all this by saying, in effect, "the messiah is supposed to tell us these things" and Jesus claims this is his role. The term "messiah" stems from the Hebrew word *mashiyach*, meaning a consecrated person, or an 'anointed one' and, as with the Greek *christos*, this can apply equally to a priest or a king (or even a Nazarite). This specific term is used here, in John 4:25 but also in 1:41, where Andrew declares that the messiah has been found. (Remember that there is a schism being represented in the

calling of the first disciples, a schism which will culminate in *two orders of priests*, which is why, I will argue, John 21 is added at a later date; obviously, I shall expand on this in due course).

The Samaritan messiah is one who will rise from their own people, i.e., the northern tribes of Joseph (Deut 18:15; also interpreted by the Jews as Elijah). He is the Taheb, the Restorer. This messianic figure will, it is said, purify the priestly cultus so that sacrifices can once again be made according to the law of Torah; give the Samaritans all the rights and blessings that are their legitimate inheritance; convert the unbelievers; and restore the temple on Mount Gerizim.

So why, if Jesus doesn't intend to fulfil this ultimate aspect of the role, does the woman accept his claim to be the 'one' who has 'come'?

The Sceptre and the Ark

The answer lies in the unexpected significance, or profundity, of Jesus' claim. The last legitimate site of worship in Israel was Shiloh, in the heart of Ephraim territory, about ten miles south of Shechem; its hereditary priesthood is unquestioned until the time of the high priest Eli, whose iniquitous ways are blamed for its destruction in about 1050 BCE. The Prophets allude to this loss in terms of a punishment, implying that the northern tribes lost their claim to the rights of the firstborn and to their sacred union with God (cf. Ps 78:60f).

The tabernacle is merely a mobile sanctuary for the divine presence, i.e., the Ark of the Covenant; the priesthood becomes holy *only* by association. If the Ark is not there, no priesthood can be legitimated; Jerusalem, because of its iniquities no longer has the Ark, so the cultus there is all but defunct.³ What Jesus seems to be suggesting here (and elsewhere in the gospel he reaffirms this perspective) is that the worship of God must be performed according to the ancient ways, before assimilation, before corruption, etc.

There is to be no structural temple; even the altar that Joshua erects on Mount Ebal is said to be of unhewn stones, meaning that it was a natural, temporary structure, not a permanent edifice. Jesus can say, without contradiction, that he can raise up a new holy temple in three days, for the new sanctuary is *not* a building, in fact, it isn't even made of stone!

We must also remember that traditionally, the Ark was *intended* to be housed in the tabernacle, i.e., a tent. Even when David takes the Ark to

³ Traditionally, the Second Temple lacked five major aspects that made the original site holy: the Ark, the sacred fire, the Shekinah, the Holy Spirit, and the Urim and Thummim.

Jerusalem, he pitches a tent for it, and despite his audacious plan for a temple, this is supposedly realised only years later, by Solomon, the king ultimately castigated for his ungodly ways and his pride. In the depiction of Nathan's prophecy, in 2 Samuel 7, it is clearly reiterated that God is unconcerned with having a permanent sanctuary; the temple is a purely human, rather egocentric notion, to tell the truth. The Sinai construction of the tabernacle is the first and therefore the definitive will of God concerning his 'dwelling place' and we find that even in Hebrews 8, the concept of the ideal *tabernacle* and Jesus' new priesthood go hand in hand.

The lover Samaria has *now*, therefore, which is not a husband, is Mount Gerizim. It is, in part, because the Samaritans have copied the Jews, erecting a permanent site on Mount Gerizim, which has no authority in Torah to justify it (although the Samaritans, today, claim otherwise), that they have lost touch with their true heritage. According to Josephus (*Ant.* 12.5.5), the temple was actually rededicated as the Temple of Jupiter Hellenius, in an effort save the Samaritans from the wrath of Antiochus, who had just stormed the temple in Jerusalem (but the anti-Samaritan zeal of the time might have influenced Josephus to make this incident more damning than it really was); the 'other gods' aspect of the Ezekiel 16 'bride' precedent certainly would be an issue if this were true.

Salvation then (ironically), comes in the form of Hyrcanus, *the Jew* who destroys the temple and, albeit unwittingly (which is another motif of the FG narrative, throughout) prepares the way for a return of the Samaritans to true worship. The destruction of the temple on Mount Gerizim is thus a blessing in disguise.

The "White" Harvest

Refusing to eat, Jesus enigmatically refers to food the disciples do not know about; it is easy to suggest that they take it to mean physical food but Jesus, of course, is implying the sustenance he gets from doing the will of God, and that his purpose includes dealing with this woman. It seems, however, that some disciples do not comprehend Jesus' *intentions*, which is actually the case throughout the narrative.

Jesus' words to the disciples, in John 4:37–8 are an allusion to God's in Joshua 24:13, where the Israelites are gathered at Shechem just before Joshua dies: "I gave you a land on which you had not laboured, that towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of the vineyards and olive yards that you did not plant." This immediately precedes Joshua's order for everyone to worship God in "sincerity and faithfulness" and to decide whom they are going to follow and worship; there is an intended connection here between Joshua and Jesus.

The whole point, I suggest, is that just as the Israelites who first entered into the Promised Land, to take possession of the territory “flowing with milk and honey,” yet who had no part in planting the vineyards or olive groves, so the disciples (as representatives of the tribes) now have the opportunity to benefit from the Samaritans’ long and arduous history *as the firstborn*, i.e., the first ‘home’ of the god of Abraham and therefore of the Israelite nation.

The time is coming for the disciples to make a choice, and soon we find that some simply do not want to be a party to Jesus’ scheme.

Jesus makes a point of contrasting the mundane with the spiritual harvest just as he does with the water and the food. A very subtle aspect of the Greek text, here, which is altered in the NRSV, is the phrase: “they are already white to harvest” (John 4:35); the Greek word for “white” is replaced with the English, “ripe.” The concept of ‘whiteness’ however, as we will see in the discussion concerning Jesus’ burial, is integral to the whole theology of the FG; whiteness alludes to purity and is a strong element of Samaritan ritualistic symbolism. What Jesus is insinuating, is that the Samaritans who are keen to hear his word are pure enough to be ‘harvested’—to be gathered. The ingathering of the nation (the gathering of the “sheep”), one of the expected duties of the Restorer, is to begin here, in the land of Joseph. It is during Passover, in John 6, that this intended gathering of the nations is made most emphatic.

There is also another cryptic calendar clue here, i.e., the “sixth hour.’ Jesus mentions that there are four months until harvest (John 4:35); in the region of Shechem/Sychar, the produce consists, primarily, of nuts, olives, pomegranates, and grapes (not wheat and barley), and these become ready for harvesting in the months of Ab and Elul (roughly August/September), so four months prior to this would be about the time of Passover, in Nisan (April).

If Jesus arrives at the “sixth hour,” this should correspond, according to our “Hours” calculations, to the 9–12 Nisan. The specific stipulation of a “two” day stay means that Jesus is invited to partake of the Passover with the Samaritans, on the evening of the fourteenth. He leaves, *symbolically*, on the “third day,” though this is not a precise calendrical date, it is mentioned so that we can see him beginning his ‘work’ in his own territory, Galilee, on the significant and divinely-sanctioned day of “union.”

The Wife

So, is Jesus coming to Jacob’s Well, like his predecessors, to find a wife? If so, for himself, as in Genesis 29, or for someone else, as in Genesis 24? That the disciples do not question Jesus’ conversation with this woman (John

4:27), even though they are surprised, might suggest they anticipated this ‘search’ but were simply amazed it happened so quickly (and this is one of many such ‘coincidences’ throughout the FG that hint at Jesus having connections and string-pullers throughout his ‘constituency’).

I struggled *intensely* with the question of Jesus’ marital status for several years, mainly because I was reluctant to jump on any bandwagons. The persistent duality of the FG, so much an element of its composition, provides us with two of almost everything; why should the most significant and central figures not be treated in the same manner? Maybe the sheer ambiguity is a clue to the reality, as will prove the case with Lazarus. Although Jesus is already married to Martha, his religious convictions are such that he takes on *another* female to serve as a symbolic fulfilment of many of his ideals. This woman is the Samaritan woman; she is Mary Magdalene.

Jesus meets Mary, at Jacob’s Well, the well of Gen 29, where Jacob meets Rachel. Finding a wife of his own kin, which both of the Genesis precedents emphasize, will ensure a Josephite King of Israel, one of the most important elements of Jesus’ entire campaign. The ideal priesthood itself *must* be hereditary, an aspect of the presiding cultus somewhat lost in the translation between bickering factions, ambitious sycophants, and Roman occupiers!

In Hosea 3, the prophet is told to seek out an “adulterous” woman and to love her. He is to do this in order to symbolise (and understand) the tolerance and forgiveness of God’s loyalty to Israel, who has turned against him. By purposefully depicting Jesus as inviting this woman (and her kin) into the ‘fold’ (and she is only *symbolically* an adulteress by virtue of her heritage, not by virtue of her *personal* sexual exploits, which could explain the subsequent myths about her being a prostitute, a sinner, etc.; the metaphor is lost on many from the start); it would also explain the emphasis on Mary and Martha being sisters, just as Rachel and Leah are in Genesis, i.e., one much older and married first. The ties of sisterhood in the FG might have been invented purely for the allusion’s continuity, i.e., it is Rachel, the younger, second wife who bears Joseph and is thus the “mother” of the Josephite tribes. Martha might be getting beyond her childbearing years and, as we see later, she is not exactly on the ‘same page’ when it comes to Jesus’ self-identification.

Jesus is on an errand of sorts, doing the work he has been given to do, the will of the one who ‘sent’ him (John 4:34), and although he seems to make reference to “the Father” everywhere else in the FG, he does not at this juncture, which is odd (and this tallies with John not identifying the “one” who sent him to baptise, i.e., in both instances this could suggest a very human, not a divine “someone”). This is the beginning of the ambiguity that

will define the ensuing personal relationships in the gospel, for we are given the subtle clue that Jesus *may* be at the well in order to find a wife for *someone else*, just as in Genesis 24, where a servant of a father (Abraham) is ‘sent’ out to seek a wife for a son (Isaac). In preparing ideal priesthood, Jesus *must* also unite the tribes so the priesthood can be a legitimate representative of the *entire* nation, something Korah had petitioned for back at Sinai but for which he was reviled. Although Jesus first ensures the conception of a male heir through his own lineage, i.e., with Mary, she is destined to be *the wife* of another man; this is proven a theological necessity as the narrative unfolds.

Mary first appears in the gospel, then, as the symbolic ‘harlot-wife’ of God, who is to undergo a complete transformation before she can aspire, or return, to her rightful position (the sevenfold cycle in Ezekiel 16, hence the “seven demons” in Luke’s depiction of her?). In reality, she is a virgin, probably only twelve or thirteen years of age.

8

THE SON OF THE MAN

THE ACT OF ‘HEALING’ IS a necessary factor of the renewal and emancipation promised in the books of the Prophets, most especially, Malachi. The sign in John 4:46–54 is not a physical healing but a spiritual one. The return to the site of Cana, where the marriage of Nathanael took place is provocative, reiterating the theme of restoration and symbolic union.

*Why then has the health of my poor
people not been restored?*

Jer 8:28

The event is described as the “second sign,” making it one of the seven special, or wondrous, ‘signs’ that reveal Jesus’ intention but also, his authority. When Jesus reaches Cana, a royal official comes out to seek his help; he asks Jesus to “come down” to heal his son who is sick, i.e., dying. This request for Jesus to “come down” to Capernaum corroborates the suggestion that Cana is up in the northern territory of Asher (as does the inference that it takes the man about a day to get back home—the same time it takes Josephus to make the journey).

The word used in the Greek to denote this character is *basilikos*, which means, “belonging to the king,” that is, in *service to* a king. This cannot be an officer attached to the court of Herod; Antipas is not a king, he is only a tetrarch. The Synoptics mention certain “Herodians” who seem to be political supporters of the Herodian family but this has no *apparent* connection to the FG’s “royal official.” We need to look, rather, at the role Jesus has accepted for himself, i.e., the “King of Israel.” All Jesus’ disciples are referred to, at one time or another, as “servants” and it is *this* particular sign that will initiate Jesus’ “work” and lead to his final victory over “the world.”

We should also read these passages while bearing in mind the “father/son” factor; the use of *paidon*, the Greek word for “little boy” in John 4:49 implies a child under the age of *legal responsibility* (i.e., under thirteen), a child who is still under the authority of his parents. A son,

remember, is his father's living image, the inheritor of his traits, beliefs, nature, etc. The son of the official in John 4, then, is *destined* to follow in his father's footsteps, i.e., to be a servant of a king.

The word used to describe the condition of the boy is *astheneo*, a word that will crop up again with the 'healing' scene in Jerusalem and in the story of Lazarus. It means "to be sick." The vocabulary of 'life' and 'death' used throughout the FG is metaphorical, as it is in the OT. Deut 4:4 explicitly equates 'life' with a steadfast devotion to God; adhering to the commandments brings 'life' (Deut 6:24); the "circumcision of the heart" to God brings life to the believer and his descendants (Deut 30:6); the search for wisdom is considered the path to 'life' (Prov 8:35–6; Prov 13:14); the *true* Israel is seen as the 'land of the living' (Isa 38:11, 53:8, etc.); and in Mal 2:5, the covenant with the priests is said to have been a "covenant of life."

The whole point of Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus was that one has to undergo a *spiritual rebirth* before one can enter into the new world order; a rebirth implies a death of sorts. The boy, perhaps on the brink of manhood (i.e., he is twelve, going on thirteen; the same age as Mary), will soon become responsible for his own path in life, for his own spiritual choices; this symbolic loss of childhood constitutes a 'death' and anticipates a rebirth. By requesting Jesus, in effect, to *save* his son "before he dies," the man is showing his determination to offer his son a life in Jesus' kingdom, right from the start. He offers his young son to Jesus, much in the manner of Samson and Samuel, to be a protégée, a Nazarite (one under oath to another or an ideal cause). According to Josephus, Samuel was (also) twelve when he was called into service (*Ant.* 5.10.4).

Jesus responds with an enigmatic turn of phrase: "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." Christian tradition holds that Jesus is angry, disappointed in the apparent necessity for tricks and 'miracles'. He *is not* angry; he is making a perfectly clear statement of obligation; he is reaffirming the promise he made to Nathanael back in John 1:50–1; the statement implies a belief contingent upon *seeing* and *understanding* signs (an implication repeated in John 6, 9, and 11). *Except* that they (the plural denotes, again, a representative nature, this time of the servant's character) witness the signs and wonders of Jesus' work (as the manifestations of God's will), they *cannot* believe (in his mission).

The performance of "signs and wonders" in the context of anticipated emancipation brings us back, yet again, to the exodus. In Exodus 7:3, signs and wonders are integral to the transformation of the pharaoh's heart; and in Deut 4:34–5, they are recalled as the means by which God had taken one nation "from the midst of another nation," *and* as the incentive for the people to "acknowledge that the Lord is God." Through these signs and wonders,

Jesus will free those under *religious* oppression, or suffering a spiritual “sickness”; he *will*, in effect, be plucking from the midst of one nation (the sinful Israel), another (the believers). Thus, Jesus’ words in John 4:48 suggest an *invitation* to witness, rather than an admonition against signs and wonders.

The sign to which the people are now witness is not a physical healing, as it supposedly takes place some distance away (at Capernaum), out of sight; no physical change is evident. The man’s open request for Jesus’ help and his desire to obtain for his son a better life are a profound risk because of *who* this man is, which I shall get to in a moment, and one which anticipates the rebellious context of the healing of the blind man in John 9. That Jesus addresses his remark to the crowd suggests, perhaps, that *this* selfless, courageous act of conversion is the ‘wondrous sign’ they must recognise. More importantly, by numbering only this sign, forcing us to enumerate each, it links to and foreshadows the seventh sign, i.e., the raising of Lazarus, which is intended to glorify both Jesus and the Father.

The exodus themes of “signs and wonders” and emancipation support a Passover context for this scene but Jesus has already celebrated Passover in Samaria. There is a strange passage, intentionally solving this dilemma for us, where the officer asks *his* servants when, exactly, his son was “cured,” to which they respond: “yesterday, at about the seventh hour” (in the Greek rendition). “One o’clock in the afternoon” simply does not give us any clue, and yet this *is* a clue, for the “seventh hour” is a non-conventional time division, so it alludes, precisely, to the seventh day of the month.

There are seven signs hinted at in this passage and now a seventh hour/day; this is Pentecost. Counting “seven times seven” days from Passover, it usually falls on the 6–7 Siwan. The seventh day is another symbolic motif that will prove its significance in the tale of Lazarus. The Pentecost celebrations include offering up the first fruits of the harvest to the priests as recognition of God as its giver; what an apt setting for the scene in the FG just described, with the son (the first fruit) being offered to Jesus!

The Son’s Father

So who is the “servant of the king”?

I suggest it is Nicodemus. He is, by virtue of his commission name and subsequent depiction in the narrative a victorious, positive character who undergoes a profound conversion. Nicodemus’ introduction, back in John 3, places him in the vicinity of Jerusalem. He is in the temple in John 7. As with other characters in the story, however, this does not imply that he lives in Jerusalem continuously. It may be that he comes into the city only

for the obligatory festivals or for some other imposed calendar of duty.

As a “leader of the Jews,” Nicodemus stands amongst the priests and Pharisees (John 7) just as Jesus stands amongst the priests and Levites in John 1; he is “one of them.” Does this mean he is a priest, a Pharisee, or both? It is possible for a priest to become a Pharisee, for the former is an inherited position, while the latter is one of choice. The teaching aspect of Nicodemus’ depiction also suggests both.

I am convinced, and will hopefully convince you, that Nicodemus is both priest *and* Pharisee, a revered elder of the upper echelons of society in Capernaum (where the “royal servant” resides). He is a teacher in the synagogue there and probably, given his standing and the influence we see him exhibit in the FG, a member of the lesser Sanhedrin (which governs each town with a population of 120 householders). This would account for his interest in accurately defining the law in John 7.

The most extensive conversation in the FG occurs between Jesus and Nicodemus, recall, and this is an echo of the profound dialogue between Salathiel and Uriel in 2 Esdras. It is a conversation that centres on faith and conversion, thus anticipating Nicodemus’ transformation from priest/Pharisee to one of Jesus’ staunchest supporters and allies. The main theme of this exchange is the need to remove all preconceptions and allegiances, in order to follow Jesus to the new Promised Land. Thus, Nicodemus, a man of authority, with reputation, position, influence, openly rejects the *inevitability* of his son inheriting what he perceives to be the futile legacy of the cultus of Jerusalem. He stands before the crowd and asks Jesus to make his son well; his bravery and loyalty make *him* the ‘sign’, not the supposed healing.

Son

Nicodemus, in requesting a new ‘life’ for his son is, in effect, requesting Jesus take the boy under his wing, i.e., to teach him, to make him his protégée. At the vital age of thirteen the young man will be destined for the priesthood, like his father, and will probably follow in his father’s footsteps and become a Pharisee, as Nicodemus would have followed his father’s example. Now it is time to break the cycle and hope for something better. He *gives* Jesus his son. The FG doesn’t leave it there, for what would be the point? This tale of conversion permeates the entire gospel, for the “official’s son” is none other than the young Lazarus.

As the discussion concerning Lazarus evolves, this will become much easier to see but one of the first clues to this identification is the “third day” motif. After Jesus stays for “two days” in Samaria, the very next scene is the appearance of Nicodemus pleading on behalf of Lazarus. Thus, the

theological union between Jesus and Lazarus is initiated on a symbolic “third day.” This is an important sequence to note. The Samaritan woman, we now know, is Mary, the young girl who represents the hopes and *physical* reality of Jesus’ mission. As the symbolic harlot she must rise through a complex testing, to become the Bride of God, the reinstated, re-elevated Israel. The parallel depictions of the elevation of both the young Mary *and* the young Lazarus begin here, in John 4.

Uniting the Rods

Earlier, it was suggested that Jesus’ right-hand man would be a Benjaminite; he would play the part of Eleazar, to Jesus’ Joshua, and thereby represent the southern tribes who made their way to Jerusalem after the Sinai schism. The ultimate and complete reunion of the tribes, according to Ezek 37:15–23, must occur before the new house of God can become a reality, however, so the prophet is told in a vision to take up a “stick” or “rod” of Ephraim (representing the Josephite, or northern tribes) and a “stick/rod” of Judah (the southern tribes) and unite them. This responsibility, Jesus apparently believes, now falls to him. He begins, as Ezekiel does, with the rod of Ephraim, i.e., the young woman at the well in Samaria, Mary. When Jesus accepts the young Lazarus as his protégée, he elects the rod of Judah.

So Lazarus, the young boy of John 4, is the representative of the tribe of Benjamin. There is much more to disclose concerning the name Lazarus and his profound significance to Jesus’ mission and the narrative of the FG but this must await a dedicated discussion when we deal with John 11 (i.e., the use of commission names and multiple identities is one of the greatest secrets of the FG; it is one of the winnowing tactics that limit the gospel’s initial “followers” to those who can discern the patterns of representation). The whole episode concerning the separation and reunion of Joseph and his brother in Genesis, however, makes the supremacy of the northern tribes (represented by Joseph) and the ultimate reunion inevitable, and it anticipates the relationship between Jesus and Lazarus that will dominate the FG.

The uniting of Mary and Lazarus, the symbolic rods of Ephraim and Judah, implies that Jesus does visit Jacob’s Well with the goal of finding a wife for someone else, i.e., for Lazarus. This suggests the meeting with Nicodemus on the open road in Cana could have been a staged ‘promotional’ event and Jesus already knew about young Lazarus and his father’s desire to have him join Jesus’ campaign. Of course, according to Judg 21:19–21, Benjaminites marry the women of Shiloh, i.e., *Samaritans*.

9

LAME MAN

THE TEMPLE IS PROFANED BY the deceit and the meaningless practices of the priests; there is despondency, and there is mounting frustration. The people look forward to the coming of a messiah, the one who will rid them of the Romans whom they believe to be the root of their problems. Jesus, however, is on a mission the masses cannot easily comprehend.

Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction ... and they drew near to the gates of death ... he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.
Ps 107:17–20

The Impotent Priest

When Jesus returns to Jerusalem, it is the time of yet another festival but it is not named, which is intriguing. For a while I considered that this might be the Festival of Tabernacles (in the month of Tishri), as this would balance with Jesus' earlier emphasis on the harvest, reaping, etc. The festival lasts for seven days, which would also be fitting but Tabernacles is alluded to in John 7, where it is named directly, so why would it not be so described here?

Then I considered the possibility that this could be New Year (1 Tishri), the only festival that receives similarly scant recognition in the OT, appearing only in Lev 23:24 and Num 29:1–6. Texts pertaining to 'judgment' and the supremacy of God are read out during this festival, and this seems to be the general gist of Jesus' speech later in this section. It is also a Sabbath day, making the argument concerning the Sabbath perfectly in context. Either way, this episode takes place in the month of Tishri.

At the Pool of Beth-zatha await many who are blind, lame, or withered. The blind and the lame appear in the prohibition of Lev 21:18–21 (LXX), where it is stated that no priests who are blemished in such a way may enter the sanctuary of the holy place. Blindness is also used metaphorically in such passages as Ps 146:8, where it symbolises a lack of wisdom (Isa 29:9–10; 35:5, etc.). In Isa 35:6, though, the dawning of a new "Holy Way" will bring the emancipation of the lame, but this new path is

intended only for God's people; the "redeemed shall walk there." This new Way is described as being like waters that "break forth in the wilderness"—a salvation for the "ransomed of the Lord."

The third category, the withered, appears in the lamentation for Israel in Ezekiel 19 (vv. 12, 13 especially), and in Joel 1:8–18 (e.g., v.12). In both these cases, Israel is pictured as a once formidable nation now besieged and near ruin. The "withered" description suggests a sapping of strength, a reduced effectiveness, etc., usually attributed to being "parched" (Isa 5:13; 35:7), e.g., not receiving the quenching waters of Truth and Life. In Joel's account, the lament is specifically targeted toward the priests; Ezekiel's is directed toward the rulers, and the consequences of their iniquities (Ezek 18:30).

These three groups fall under the general heading of *astheneis*, or "invalids," a term used in John 4:46, here in John 5, and then again, in John 11. Elsewhere in the NT, it is used as a description of those who lack morality, authority, or dignity (e.g., Rom 6:19, 2 Cor 11:21, 13:4, Heb 5:2, etc.). Each group is also *distinctly* represented in the FG narrative; in John 4:10–15 the people are parched, in need of the "living water" (they are "withering"), in John 5 there is the lame man, and the blind are represented in John 9.

The infirm of the FG, then, are not the *physically* weak, the beggars on the streets, the old, the sick; this is the traditional Christian interpretation. The FG Jesus is far from concerned with personal illness and deformity, with poverty, or individual misery; he is concerned with the illegitimacy of the Jerusalem temple cultus and the oppression of the true heir to the priestly kingdom. Illness and weakness are symptoms of a more profound instability; the *nation* is weak, unclean, blemished, because its *priesthood* is.

The Sheep Gate is alluded to; it is not specifically mentioned in the Greek. The term used is *probatikē* and this simply means "pertaining to sheep" but traditional translations infer that "Gate" is intended. For now, let's go with that, but I have more to say on this later. The Sheep Gate is one of the closest of all the gates to the temple itself, built by the high priest Eliashib and his fellow priests (Neh 3:1f); it is the only gate of Jerusalem to be explicitly described as receiving priestly consecration. Far from being the site where everyday shepherds herd their sheep through the city, it is the gate through which the sacrificial sheep are brought to the temple, thus, it is the place where officiating priests and Levites will be congregating when there is a festival. The insinuation is that Jesus performs his act of attempted conversion (for that is what is happening here) within priestly territory and he gradually works closer and closer to the central hub of the temple as the story progresses.

In the Jerusalem of Jesus' day, there are many, many priests, but there

are generally only two distinct classes of priest, i.e., the ordinary and the chief priests. Ordinary priests are those who form a community of priestly families that can supposedly trace its genealogy right back to the original priesthood at Sinai. Animosity and resentment forge a great rift between these relegated orders and their superiors, the chief priests; accusations of nepotism, greed, even cruelty and theft are raised against them. With their strong affiliation to the dominant Pharisees, nothing can be done to release the underdog from the oppression of the illegitimate supervisors of the house of God.

*There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones because of my sin ... my iniquities ...
weigh like a burden too heavy for me ... I am utterly bowed down and ...
prostrate ... My friends ... stand aloof from my affliction,
and my neighbours stand far off.*

Ps 38: 2–11

The impotence of this faction of the priesthood is reiterated in the lame man's response to Jesus' direct question: "Do you *want* to be made well?" (John 5:6). He replies in a weak and ambiguous manner, blaming his failure to "rise" above his infirmity on the lack of a "helper"; this is a clear echo of Amos 5:2, which speaks of Israel having fallen, with "no one to raise her up," and Eccl 4:1, which speaks of the oppressed who have no one to comfort them (see also Pss 72:12, 14; 107:12, and Isa 63:5). Others, he moans, reach the water before him, so his anticipation of true cleansing has been postponed for "thirty-eight years," the period of time some interpreters see as corresponding to the timeframe mentioned in Deut 2:14, during which the sinful generation perished in the wilderness. In the comparable spiritual wilderness, the lame man awaits the coming of the one who can lead him into the idealistic Promised Land.

The Deuteronomy 2 quotation is unique in the OT, for usually the sojourn in the wilderness is referred to in generic (and symbolic) terms, i.e., as "forty years." If we are meant to take note of the context of this *specific* passage, we must recognise the concept of a divine culling of the wicked, of those who retain the 'sin', the guilt, i.e., of Egyptian assimilation. There is an FG character, a disciple, to whom a similar but slightly less extreme reckoning applies, and Jesus' own reference to "sin" supports the OT context.

There is something about the way the FG uses numbers, however, that makes me think there is more to this precise measure of "thirty-eight years." It is a clue to a specific date relating to the efficacy of the priesthood itself. If the lame man is a priest, it would make sense for the "thirty-eight years" of his inaction, or inability, to correspond to the length of time his priestly

family has been out of a job, so to speak. He has lost the potential for rising to any higher position, let alone to the high-priesthood.

The problem we have here, however, is one of continuity. We shall soon discover that the FG's tale is not as linear, or sequential, as might first appear, so the year reference here must be deciphered once other clues have been revealed. This is a constant issue in this interpretation and can't be avoided but the end result is well worth the initial frustration. To make my point, however, I shall provide the necessary information at this juncture: the "thirty-eight years" refers to the year 4 BCE, when King Herod died.

Upon Herod's death, the kingdom was divided amongst his three sons, with Judea and Samaria going to Archelaus, who proved to be so ineffectual and unpopular his own subjects requested his dismissal. It was the beginning of the end for the traditional and hereditary priesthood, for when Archelaus left and Judea was annexed to Syria (6 CE), so Josephus tells us; "...all sorts of misfortunes" befell the Judeans, i.e., murders, seditions, depositions, and of a loss of "friends, who used to alleviate [their] pain" (*Ant.* 18.1.1). A famine weakened the city, and the temple itself caught fire. He continues by claiming that "the customs of our fathers were altered, and such a change was made"; nothing was the same. High priests were appointed, influential families (such as Annas' and Caiaphas') were favoured, and the lower echelons of the cultus were relegated to virtual "slavery."

This sounds pretty much like the infirm and tired old Jerusalem that Jesus enters into at the time of New Year. With nothing but a commandment to rise, pick up his bundle, and walk, however, Jesus demonstrates the ease with which the dejected priest *can* reject his oppressors, *if* he really wants to:

Gather up your bundle from the ground, O you who live under siege!
Jer 10:17

Stand up like a man, and I will instruct you.
2 Esd 2:33

Furthermore, the reference to a precise number of years implies a *specific* priestly event, i.e., the appointment of the high priest Eleazar ben Boethus, also in 4 BCE. My reasoning can only be appreciated once further chapters of the FG have been interpreted but it has to do with the concepts of rivalry and the rights of the firstborn, *and* the use of commission names.

The chronological significance of this for the FG is that this "lame man" episode takes place in c. 34 CE. Already we are made aware that the timeline for the gospel is not as it 'should' be, for Jesus' storming of the temple occurs in c. 36 CE, as noted. The author is telling us, again and again, how to read his gospel; he hints at the number of signs and how we must

recognise them, he provides the elucidation of Nicodemus so we know that we must ‘start from scratch’, and he provides simple but largely overlooked clues on the historical context of his account.

In the lame-man scenario Jesus is *acting* like a priest. It makes sense that the lame man, a weak, ineffectual, pathetic member of an oppressed and resentful order, does as he is told when ordered by an apparent superior. Confirming his association to the extant priesthood, he, like the emissaries of priests and Levites in John 1, seems to reveal an ignorance of the fundamental truth concerning *who* Jesus is. Or does he? The only reason he *cannot* pick Jesus out for the Jews is because Jesus has slipped into the crowd; it doesn’t mean the lame man fails to recognise Jesus’ face. This is a clue: The lame man is Peter.

When Peter is introduced, in John 1:42, there is no mention of him ‘remaining’ with Jesus, as the first two disciples had done. There is only the strange commission name that implies his inevitable disciplining. The allusion to the reckoning of the “wicked generation” fits this context and we will see at least two other allusions to Peter’s disassociation from the loyal followers of Jesus.

As the professional ‘brother’ of Andrew, who is also a priest, Peter is possibly in Jerusalem performing his regular duties; ordinary priests are allowed to live in the outlying country but have to be in Jerusalem for their prescribed term of office, so his abode in Bethsaida is justified, as is his location near the Sheep Gate, especially at the time of a festival. His subsequent characterisation, too, fits this nameless figure perfectly, as we shall see!

It is the action of physical labour on the Sabbath, however, to which the Jews react, not to any semblance of a healing miracle, and this reaction anticipates that of the Pharisees in John 9, i.e., there is no physical change, *per se* (and this makes me wonder why the lame man, had he truly been a sick person awaiting a medical cure, would *expect* anyone to “throw [“put” in the NRSV] him” into the water on such a day as it would not have been allowed anyway). When the Jews, the other priests, Pharisees, etc., confront him, it comes as no surprise when the lame man simply squeaks, “he told me to do it,” expecting them to realise that he was just following orders. Jesus, meanwhile, slips away, concealing himself in the crowd, obviously not wishing to be made the centre of attention, not wanting the Pharisees to catch him in the act (which is further hinted at, even explained, later on in the FG narrative). Inside the temple precinct Jesus “finds” Peter; the question is, has he *sought* him out? Jesus’ next words sound like a rebuke, a warning, perhaps even a threat: “I have made you well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you” (John 5:14).

The concept of sin in the Hebrew tradition is ambiguous. The Hebrew

language actually has no single word to describe what Christianity refers to as theological sin; it is a broad term with many connotations, including failure, guilt, and the breaching of a covenant. The sin to which Jesus refers in v.14 may allude to the sin of the “wicked generation” in the wilderness, or it may just as easily pertain to the lame man’s guilt by virtue of his former insipience. His sin would then be one of inaction and apathy in the face of his responsibility, i.e., he has failed to keep the covenant of priests. If he returns to his previous life, now that he has been shown the path to ‘freedom’, a worse fate awaits him, e.g., the wrath of God and a spiritual death.

*If you are rising to this same life, you should rather be dead;
but rouse yourself to a better one!*

Acts of John 52

Why would this warning, so in keeping with the concept of the reinstated priesthood and the demise of the old regime, sound so personal a threat? Jesus *recognises* Peter as the one who was introduced to him earlier; he had the opportunity to follow, yet he is still here, acting as though nothing is different. He still awaits someone to ‘help’ him. His sin, perhaps, is more to do with his failure to accept Jesus as the path to emancipation. If he sins again, e.g., by giving the Jews the information they want, he will suffer a worse fate than having someone promoted before him.

That Jesus and his disciples are in any way violent has been a matter of denial, or a matter of concern, for all those who broach the subject but it has proven a necessary avenue of investigation, despite its provocative nature. The FG’s account of Jesus’ apparent desire to replace the temple cultus is not recorded in the FG as an *overtly* militant one, even though his ‘first’ action within the temple area *is* violent. So many factions are extant in Jerusalem at this time, factions who have their own political or religious agenda, some of whom are armed; it seems unlikely that Jesus, given the enormity and intense nature of his task, does not resort at least to a few verbal threats when needed. He is a man of his time, and a man on a mission. I cannot see him actually setting thugs on the lame man but I can fully accept that in his warning is more than a theological sermon to be ‘good’ in future.

As his warning anticipated, however, the moment Jesus’ back is turned the lame man, Peter, possibly *feeling* threatened, runs off to inform the Jews that he knows who had ordered him to break the Sabbath—Jesus. Jesus, the troublemaker who ransacked the tables in the temple, is now inciting the lower echelons to rebellion by suggesting they can flout the Pharisaic laws. Accusations of breaking the law and of blasphemy abound, and from this moment on Jesus is ‘persecuted’ and under a death threat. It is

from this moment that Peter's role in the FG is set; he is a weak, impressionable, and untrustworthy character.

Again forced into a situation he simply has to make the best of, Jesus repeats, in a long soliloquy, the claim to divine authority, not divinity itself, and again he assures the crowd of greater works to come. He tries to explain that he has been sent from the Father, that he is the representative "son" whose authority must be heeded if Israel is to be saved. The very works that he is doing *should* verify his identity and intention, should win the nation's support; the scriptures prophesied that he would come but the people fail to comprehend. Moses, attributed author of Torah, 'wrote' of him: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet ... from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet" (Deut 18:15),¹ yet no one believes. They do not truly know the scriptures and, therefore, do not (according to Jesus) have God within them.

Beth-zatha

Returning to the site itself, Beth-zatha is explicitly referred to as being a Hebrew name,² so it is from the Hebrew we must find our meaning, and this meaning should be discernible within a biblical context. It may be a play on *zarah*, which can mean "to cast away, or disperse," e.g., "to winnow," which would certainly suit the winnowing effect of the FG itself, but it also anticipates the theme of separation that *will* become a significant aspect of this particular disciple's depiction, especially in John 18 and 21.

I am going to take a bit of a leap forward, however, to my discussion concerning the adulteress in John 8; Jesus turns the judgement of the accusers upon *them*, intimating that it is *they* who are adulterous and whoring, *not* the woman in question. The most damning passage in the FG, the adulteress' story, was 'conveniently' lost from some early translations. I propose that "Beth-zatha," if not suffering a similar fate and thus an altered version of the original, is *intended* to be (at least) a play on 'Beth-zanah,' i.e., "house of the adulterer, of whoredom," etc., where *zanah* is the term employed in almost every OT instance of religious adultery, or idolatry (e.g.,

¹ It is to this precedent that John 4:44 seems to allude but the addendum is awkward, for Jesus has just left the welcoming Samaritans to go to Galilee. If he leaves Samaria because "his own people" do not honour him, this both contradicts the preceding scene and confirms his "own people" *are* the Samaritans!

² The area Josephus describes as "Bezetha" (*Wars*. 5.4.2) is in this general vicinity; work started on it during the reign of Agrippa I (37–44 CE) and was completed by his son, Agrippa II. It would certainly have been known in the lifetime of the FG author and should also be considered as a potential influence on the name Beth-zatha.

Exod 34:15f, Lev 20:6, Ezek 6:9, and many others). The priesthood has not been faithful, remember, to their divine marriage partner, so the intimation would be just as damning but just as clear as in the adulteress' scene.

Even the name Bethesda however, has conflicting translations. The name is composed of *beth* ("house") + *cheched*, which, due to the Christian tradition of Jesus' complete benevolence, has been translated to mean "kindness, merciful," etc., but which can also mean "reproach," or a "wicked thing," making Bethesda, potentially, the "house of the wicked."

The "five porticoes" symbolise the five tribes of Judah (this is discussed further in relation to John 6), i.e., representing those who followed Eleazar to Jerusalem after the schism at Sinai. The waters of Beth-zatha, near the priestly Sheep Gate, are therefore restricted, symbolically, to those of the southern tribes. That is, the *priesthood* is restricted and is thus impotent, for it represents only a portion of Israel. *That* is why the waters are ineffectual at 'healing' those who bathe in them. Peter doesn't comprehend this, even when Jesus tells him a better life and more freedom awaits if Peter simply gets up and walks away.

Amen

Another interesting thing to mention is the use of 'amen' in Jesus' response. To the Samaritans, the Torah is also known as "the Verity," i.e., the Truth, and this is how the word *amen* is translated. Almost every instance in which Jesus uses this phrase, he is alluding to something in Torah, such as here, in John 5, where he speaking of judgement, and in the legal deliberations of John 8 and 10.

10

SAMARITAN REBELLION

Passover

JESUS HAS OBVIOUSLY WITHDRAWN FROM Jerusalem by John 6 and we find him up in the north again, this time on the “other side” of the Sea of Tiberias, but where exactly? In Deut 4:43 and Josh 20:9, certain cities spanning the Israelite land are designated as sites of refuge for those fleeing the death sentence until an official trial can be arranged; the city of refuge which seems to tally with Jesus’ position is the city of Golan, in Bashan, i.e., the Golan Heights. Jesus *is* under a death threat. Historically, Golan is both a Levitical (priestly) city and a city of the tribe of Manasseh, i.e., a Josephite city; Joshua gives it to the descendants of the priests (Josh 21:27).

Jesus attempts to remove himself from the crowds that keep following him, suggesting a certain reticence is creeping in. He is high on a vantage point, overlooking the plain below, for he can see the throng approaching. In his day the area around the Sea of Galilee, although surrounded by hills, was quite heavily built up, so Golan would be an ideal place both for safety and for the commanding vista required to be able to see such a vast, itinerant crowd.

The place of the feeding in John 6 is described as having “much grass” (John 6:10), and this fits the Bashan area very well; in several OT passages it is referred to in terms of its rich pasture lands (Deut 32:14, Isa 33:9, Nahum 1:4, etc.).

Compare *these* passages:

I will restore Israel to its pasture, and it shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead its hunger shall be satisfied ... for I will pardon the remnant that I have spared.

Jer 50:19

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when

you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvellous things.

Mic 7:14–15

The Josephites receive the ‘forest’ lands as part of their inheritance, in Josh 17. In this Josephite and priestly setting, then, John 6 opens with Jesus on a mountain, very near the time of the Passover (Nisan/April), i.e., two strong images that evoke the exodus story. The prevalent FG theme is also to be understood as one of bondage, of imminent freedom, and of God’s desire to redeem his faithful people. In the account of Joshua’s final Passover in the wilderness there is a link to Jesus’ action, for the day *after* Passover the “pure” Israelites enter the Promised Land of Canaan (Josh 5:11). Jesus is trying, *desperately* trying, to convince his followers that a new Promised Land awaits them. His Bashan location and the “marvellous” action that takes place there constitute an *intentional* fulfilment of the OT passages telling of the anticipated emancipation and reconstitution of Israel.

What we are about to witness on the mountain in Bashan *is* a Samaritan-style observance of Passover, not a ‘picnic’ as some authors have described it. The Samaritan Passover is celebrated just as the first Passover had been (in Exodus 12); it is conducted on the slopes of a mountain (traditionally, Mount Gerizim), and includes the entire community, though men are the only ones permitted to take part in the actual ceremony. Initially, everyone sits for prayer. No Gentiles are allowed, nor anyone who is not ritually clean. Men and women are separated. The young boys offer the sacrificial foods to the officiating priest, who then offers a prayer of thanks, asking God for the forgiveness of sins.¹

Certain OT texts are read out in Hebrew, in celebration of the emancipation from Egypt through the “signs and wonders” of God, and of the settlement in the Promised Land. The priest has an assistant who is a layman; between them they slaughter *seven* lambs in the first two minutes of twilight. Twelve ministers, dressed in white, perform ritualistic duties. The unleavened bread and the herbs are distributed first; when the lamb is ready for consumption, it is separated into *seven* large baskets, from which the various families are called forth to receive their portion. The feast is eaten on the ground. When they are finished, they gather up every fragment and burn *what is left* on a makeshift altar.²

¹ Interestingly, this is the only context in which the Passover meal is related to the expiation of sins, and then it is the priest’s prayer, not the animal that is the central element. The discussion concerning the meaning of John’s ‘lamb’ is further supported.

² The Samaritan and the Jewish Passover fall on different days, even though both prepare on the fourteenth and eat their meal on the fifteenth Nisan. The former count the day from midnight, while the latter, from dusk. Thus, the Samaritan Passover

The emphasis on political correctness in our modern world has actually taken away some of the meaning of these ancient texts, for in the desire to make men and women equal wherever possible, original distinctions are lost. This is a case in point. The NRSV translates 6:10 as “Let the people sit down ... so they sat down.” In the Greek, the words for “people” and “they” are actually masculine; *anthropous* and *andres* (men), respectively. Passover is one of the three festivals (along with Pentecost and Tabernacles) that must be celebrated by every *male* Israelite; the attendance of women is voluntary. So, the distinction between the male and female followers *is* significant. It suggests that Jesus’ own ‘sign’ is intended more for the men than the women, and of this it is worth keeping a mental note, for it is actually a common attribute of Jesus’ campaign.

In the FG’s feeding scene, a boy, just as in the Samaritan Passover ritual, comes toward the priest (Jesus) with *five* barley loaves (barley bread is ‘common’ bread, usually unleavened, as opposed to wheat bread, which was a luxury; leaven was not to be eaten or touched before the Passover) and *two* (the Greek implies *dried*) fish, a precise number that many interpreters deem insignificant (focusing, as they do, on the supposed ‘miracle’ of feeding so many with so little) but which actually proves to be *fundamental* to the understanding of this new ‘sign’.

On first glance, the basic ‘five plus two equals seven’ numerology may symbolise the seven baskets of food used for the Samaritan Passover service but there is a much more pertinent symbolism here. *Two* sons were born to Joseph, representing the northern tribes (Gen 41:50) and *five* to Judah, representing the southern tribes (1 Chr 2:4). The dispersion of the food, then, symbolises the scattering of the tribes. The gathering of the fragments into *twelve* baskets (there are twelve ministers distributing the food and Jesus anticipates twelve ministers in his new kingdom) anticipates their reunion and the reconstruction of the *ideal* Israel. In the prophecy of Ezek 39:28, the tribes of Israel will be gathered into their own lands again, and none will be left behind.

Let us draw a comparison. In the days of Elijah the prophet, there is a great famine in Samaria and all but one of the prophets, i.e., Elijah, are killed. A competition between the many prophets of Baal, and Elijah (alone) is set up in order to prove the Israelite god more powerful and, of course, Elijah’s god wins. Jezebel, the infamous queen of Israel, takes her misguided revenge on Elijah, who flees into the wilderness of Judah (Judea), from where he travels to Mount Horeb and here he has an encounter with God (1 Kings 19). The context in 1 Kings is one of hunger, a lone prophet, a mountain, and a

might fall on our 1 April, and the Jewish on 2 April, yet each would be adhering to biblical stipulation.

divided sense of rightful worship. So far, this parallels John 6 nicely. God tells Elijah that all the Baal worshippers will be killed but, he promises, “seven thousand” will be left in Israel, i.e., “all the knees that have not bowed down to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kgs 19:18). Thus, a remnant of “seven thousand” loyal worshippers remains.

There are about “five thousand” on the mountain in Bashan with Jesus³; he has just shown them a ‘sign’ with the union of loaves and fishes:

$$\begin{aligned}
 5 + 2 &= 7 = \text{Perfection/Unity} \\
 5 \text{ (loaves)} + 2 \text{ (fish)} &= 12 \text{ baskets} \\
 5 \text{ (sons)} + 2 \text{ (sons)} &= 12 \text{ tribes united} \\
 5 \text{ (loaves)} + 2 \text{ (fish)} &= 7 \text{ items of Passover sacrifice} \\
 5(000) + 2(000) &= 7(000) \text{ worshippers of God (Remnant)}
 \end{aligned}$$

When Elijah ‘finds’ Elisha, his successor, at the rear of a yoke of *twelve* oxen, he gives the young man his “mantle,” thus officially recognizing him; he kills the oxen to feed the people. Thus, the hunger of the Remnant is satisfied by a shared meal, in the symbolic numerical context of *seven* and *twelve*, and in terms of a prophet and his protégée.

The fact that only the bread fragments, not the fish, seem to multiply so dramatically in John 6, together with the emphasis on “gathering,” serve to reiterate the exodus precedent, where the bread from heaven, the “manna” (Exod 16:15–16) is sent to quell the complaints of the people. “When you see the bread increase in quantity,” God tells them, “you will know that it isn’t I who keeps you hungry.” In fact, Jesus’ words in John 6:26f are explicit about this precedent, and his insistence on identifying the ‘bread’ with spiritual, not physical satisfaction parallels his refusal to eat at the well in Sychar.

The order to collect the fragments so that “nothing may be lost” brings to mind the passage in Jer 23:1–4, where God blames the bad shepherds for scattering the people of Israel, and in his promise to gather them and return them to the fold, he assures that they will not be afraid (cf. John 6:20), and none will “be missing.” By John 17:12 and 18:9, Jesus can identify with the good shepherd, for none except the one *destined* to be lost has gone missing (more on this in due course).

Jesus’ invitation to the masses, then, to eat the Passover on Josephite land, is politically provocative. The fundamental argument between the Samaritan and Judean peoples has been one concerning the legitimate locus

³ This is also another sign that a Passover meal is taking place here, for the number of ‘diners’ had to be calculated as closely as possible, so that the food would be neither too much, nor too little.

of worship; Samaritans insist they have a *bone fide* right to worship in the land of their inheritance, and Jesus is now supporting this claim, intentionally evoking the memory of Exod 5:1 and the very oppression of religious worship that supposedly led to the flight from Egypt.⁴

It is during this celebration that Jesus puts his hand-chosen disciple, his son Philip, to the test (John 6:6), a test he fails by completely overlooking the allegorical nature of the situation. Philip, as predicted, is blinded by his pragmatic nature; he sees no further than the necessity for, and the apparent deficit of, food. He sees not with the eyes of an Israelite (he is no Elisha) but with the eyes of a Greek and this will cost him his potential place as Jesus' right-hand-man. Such a result is foreshadowed by the "complaining" in the desert in Num 11:18f, where a similar concern for 'meat' and 'fish' is voiced, a miraculous feeding takes place, and a subsequent disappointment results. It is Andrew, the priest, who at least sees the boy with the victuals but even Andrew fails to 'see' Jesus' meaning completely.

Because of his apparent heritage, i.e., Jesus' Josephite son by Martha, Philip *should* understand. He *should* comprehend the allusion to Arzareth looming in the distance behind them, where all the scattered, disassociated tribes are, waiting for someone to show them the 'way home'. He *should* see the allusion to Elijah and Elisha, and the union of the tribes but he does not. He simply doesn't have what it takes to "feed the sheep"—an idealistic concept that will form the basis of another testing later. This type of testing is consistent, with respect to Jesus' election of his inner circle of followers. He has tested the Samaritan woman, now Philip; he will test Lazarus, and then Peter.

(This FG chapter really introduces the priestly behaviour of Jesus. It is an interesting fact that the priestly benediction, i.e., the blessings during the Passover, etc., were performed with outstretched hands, with the fingers divided between the middle and ring fingers. What is the 'blessing' sign traditionally depicted in images of Jesus? The hand outstretched, with the little finger and ring finger bent downward slightly. One of the earliest Christian illustrations in the catacombs was of Jesus holding both his hands out in this very form of benediction; at the same time, however, the tombs of the Israelite *priestly families* were being similarly decorated!)

... not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the Lord.
Amos 8:11

⁴ 2 Kgs 23:21, which depicts the storming of the temple by Josiah, also tells of the re-establishment of Passover according to Torah—something that had not been preserved in the temple of Jerusalem.

Let all who are hungry come and eat.

Passover Liturgy

Sea and Symbol

The previous episode, the Passover meal on the mountain, when taken *together* with the following scene rather than as distinct ‘miracles’, proves to be one of the most difficult and sensitive chapters of the FG and of this investigation because it introduces us to a vital collection of clues that reaffirm Jesus’ movement as being one that involves a degree of violence, as was exhibited in the storming of the temple scene. Before we get to the more dramatic version of events that history *has* managed to retain, albeit in scattered fragments, we must first understand the FG author’s intention in presenting this version of the story the way he does. I will return to this section of the gospel with a proposed alternative explanation. What results is an astonishing but feasible substitute for the Christian tradition and one that makes complete sense given the overall interpretation of the FG I put forward here, i.e., the gathering on this mountaintop is the primary cause of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

The reaction of the crowd, at first, seems to parallel that of Nathanael and the Samaritans, in that they recognise in Jesus a messianic, or prophetic quality, i.e., his authority *is* acknowledged (John 6:14). No sooner is Jesus relieved to see that his ‘sign’ seems to be working, than his optimism is dashed, for the crowd has apparently misinterpreted. They perceive Jesus to be either the awaited Davidic ‘king’, the messiah of David who is to lead the nation in a revolt against their oppressors, or a provisional military king, as Josephus describes: “[A]s the several companies of the seditious lighted upon any one to head them, he was created a king immediately” (*Ant.* 17.10.8). After all he has said and done, all he has tried to explain and prove, Jesus still cannot get the people to understand. The ‘signs and wonders’ seem to be falling on more stony ground than soil!

Jesus runs away, again, accusing the crowd of seeking him out because they “ate [their] fill of the loaves” (John 6:26). Hosea puts it well: “When I fed them, they were satisfied ... and their heart was proud (Hos 13:6). Their immediate desire and the source of their satisfaction has remained on the level of the mundane. The analogy of the crowd taking their fill of physical food corresponds to their mundane expectations and immediate concerns, e.g., a hunger to see Rome destroyed—but it is not the Roman occupation which keeps Israel ‘hungry’. This is what the crowd wants, or expects, to see, so this is what they *do* see.

Jesus, however, rejects their insistence to make him their ruler. In fact, the word used to describe their action, *harpazien*, implies that they attempt to “seize” him, to take him by force: “Someone will ... seize a relative, a

member of the clan, saying, ‘You have a cloak; You shall be our leader and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule.’” (Isa 3:6). In this passage from Isaiah, the one seized to be king of an ‘oppressed’ nation also refuses, blaming the iniquity of Jerusalem itself for the people’s present, degraded state (3:7–8). Jesus has his kingdom mapped out; this is not what he has in mind.

Alone and rethinking his strategy, Jesus sits up on the mountain, while his disciples go down to the sea. Generally known as the Sea of Galilee, this body of water is also called Chinereth, or Chinneroth (the Hebrew form in, e.g., Num 34:11), Gennesar (1 Macc. 11:67), and Gennesareth in the Synoptics. Only the FG refers to it as the “Sea of Galilee of Tiberias” or “the Tiberian Sea,” so again the reader is urged to make a certain connection, to arrive at a certain interpretation that is unique to this gospel. For such a Hebrew-orientated gospel, the use of a Roman name is itself worth noting and questioning.

Herod Antipas erected the great city of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea in c. 23 CE, to mark the sixty-fifth birthday of Tiberius Caesar. It was the showcase of Antipas’ tetrarchy, and became his capital but the site was shunned by devout Israelites whose abhorrence of Levitical uncleanness due to contact with the dead (Num 19:11) prohibited them from entering the city, for it had been built upon the site of a cemetery, thus perpetually defiling anyone living there. Josephus remarks that Herod bribed “poor people” with houses, in order to raise the population, and many country dwellers were brought by force to reside in the city (*Ant.* 18.2.3). In fact, Josephus tells of an incident in which a “great multitude” were led to the outskirts of the city by a Roman commander *specifically* to show to them “the power of the Romans and the threatenings of Caesar” (*Wars.* 2.10.3). Tiberias is thus a *recognised symbol of the power of Rome*. The malevolence of the deep, i.e., the sea, is also an integral part of the interpretation of this scenario and has precedents in many OT passages: “On that day the Lord ... will punish the Leviathan ... the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea” (Isa 27:1); “Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me?” (Job 7:12); “for the sea was growing more and more tempestuous” (Jonah 1:17). In context, these passages tell of the power of God to defend his people from peril, and the ultimate salvation of those who trust in him. The sea, or the Leviathan, the ‘dragon’ that dwells in its murky and turbulent depths, is an enemy, an oppressor, etc., which God conquers for the sake of his Israel. Psalms 107 (the same psalm which speaks of the distressed and afflicted at the gates whom God heals, the thirsty wanderers in the desert who are led to salvation by the straight path of God’s making, and the bondage of those who claim to have no helper) offers this image:

Some went down to the sea in ships ... they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea ... they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits' end. ... Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still ... and he brought them to their desired haven.

Ps 107:23–30

What happens John 6:16–21? The disciples go down to the sea, to a boat, the sea becomes rough because a storm is brewing, they are afraid, there is an apparently divine intervention bringing them to their destination.

Have the people confused Jesus' intention? Are his tactics just too subtle and too arcane to work with a crowd so hungry to see Rome vanquished? Jesus, probably disillusioned and tired by now, withdraws from the crowd, and although he turns up on the other side of the water apparently *before* they do, this is not a miracle, just a 'clean getaway'. I can imagine him getting down to the boat first and hiding under the fishing nets, waiting for the disciples, whom the crowd presume to be alone at this point; during the voyage he reveals himself, startling the men. Not exactly the Jesus of tradition but the FG preserves perhaps the only glimpse of Jesus the man, and he is not a natural rebel, i.e., he shows fear, doubt, frustration, and confusion in the narrative. Meanwhile, boats "from Tiberias" are arriving—officials, no doubt, coming to see what this vast crowd is up to, but Jesus is not to be found; he has managed to get himself away to Capernaum, his family home.

This is a *pragmatic* version of events. So, what of the so-called miracle?

The man, Jesus, does not walk on water. The 'sign' is an ancient, traditional but purely literary one, gleaned from what would have been very well-known precedents. It may be that Jesus gives something of a pep talk to his disciples before they leave, and so this 'sign' is a reinterpretation of Jesus' reassurance to them but the scene itself is a literary construct, intended to reaffirm Jesus' priorities.

By symbolically treading upon the waves of the Sea of Tiberias Jesus is placing Rome, and by extension, the insidious Herod Antipas, under his foot, rejecting the *inevitability* of their supremacy, just as God suppresses the Leviathan. Simply destroying the Romans, without perceiving the *internal* iniquity that keeps Israel under oppression, however, is no true victory but in this 'sign' is the key to a future, *eternal* emancipation ('Life').

When the people of Israel again accept God as their true salvation, when they conduct their lives according to the covenant, they will make themselves worthy in his sight once more, the Davidic messiah will appear,

and the tools of God's wrath (the enemy) will be effectively destroyed ... this is just what the 'sign' on the mountain was all about.

*O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!
Then I would quickly subdue their enemies.*
Ps 81:1-14

*Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.
I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them.*
Ps 91:15

"I AM"

Although the NRSV has, at John 6:20, "It is I; do not be afraid," the Greek reads: "I am; do not be afraid." The use of the "I AM" phrase has become one of the most controversial and debatable utterances in the FG. When Jesus employs the 'I AM' what *is* his meaning? Is he implying that he has become convinced he *is* God? No. He only claims to be the representative 'son', the authority, the elected voice of God. Remember that in the Samaritan tradition, there is an inherited prophetic "light" that comes directly from God *within* his chosen ones. Jesus is making claim to *this* unique phenomenon, or office.

The true prophet speaks in the name of God (Exod 5:23; Deut 18:22; Jer 26:20, etc.) and the use of the divine name enforces the divine *authorization* of an agent of God, as in Exod 23:20-1: "I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice ... *for my name is in him.*"

There is no superstition concerning the utterance of the divine name in the Samaritan faith; it is an optimistic, worshipful act. It constitutes, after all, the very *credentials* of Moses' mission: "*say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you'*" (Exod 3:14). If Moses is allowed to utter the "I AM" as a sign to those seeking emancipation, so is Jesus! The tradition of the Psalms, especially, points strongly towards the potent power of the *name* of God itself. Its invocation in such passages as Pss 54:1; 75:1; 79:6, etc., etc., suggests a correlation between keeping the 'name' of God alive and salvation; those who forget to invoke the name of God, perish.

What, though, of the arcane "I AM WHO I AM" phrase (Gen 3:14)? This, to me, suggests a deliberate ambiguity that is necessary for Moses to address the conglomerate of peoples who constitute the exodus. If the migration from Egypt is a historical fact (which I will debate in a future book), the multitude would represent all manner of religious beliefs from the various Egyptian and Israelite faiths, and every possible conflation of these. *Whose* "God" is this? In order to avert all potential quarrels against Moses

unilaterally deciding which deity has such authority, he is given this ‘name’ to impart that more or less implies: “Call me what you will, I am the same for everyone.”

The more we understand the nature of Jesus’ intentions in John 6, and the more we learn of his overall goals, the greater we can appreciate his identification with the “I AM.” His supporters see Jesus’ essence, or substance, as pre-established (by virtue of his divine calling), yet his *identification* changes; it is all a part of the theme of mystery and ambiguity. To some he is the “anointed one” (which can have various applications), to the Samaritans he appears as a Jew but then as the Taheb, to the Jews a Samaritan, to some a priest, to others a king.

When, for instance, Jesus asks the soldiers who come to arrest him in the garden *who* it is they are looking for, they say “Jesus the Nazorean” (in the Greek text), and he responds: “I told you that I AM” (John 18:4–8). To make the phrase more ‘correct’ in the English, “he” has been added (“I am he”) but this dilutes the significance of the declaration. Jesus is effectively saying: “I will be who I will be. No matter what you call me, I am, in essence, what God wills me to be.” (A certain truth is placed on the lips of these enemies, as usual, but I shall wait until the appropriate juncture to discuss this.)

The same can be said of John 6. Jesus has just been calming his disciples, trying to convince them that all will be well. His use of the “I AM” is thus a double claim, for on the one hand Jesus is stating that he *will* be what he will be, i.e., *nothing* will prevent his fulfilment of his duty to God; on the other, he is suggesting that he will be whatever he *has* to be in order to succeed, and I think this is where some of his followers begin to part company. He is becoming just a bit *too* formidable (or ambitious?) for the average disciple to comprehend or condone.

Still, there is another interpretation of the other “I AM” sayings, when they are predicated by “the door,” “the way,” etc. The allusion to the name of God is subtler but still there. In Isa 6:8, the prophet uses “I AM” to mean, “Here I am, send me,” and in Isaiah 43, we hear God asking the tormented Israel why she has not called on her God; telling her not to fear, God repeats, several times, “I am here,” “I am the one who will save you,” “I am the redeemer.” This all takes place in the context of “passing through the waters,” and redemption for those who return to the one ‘true’ god, the creator, the Holy One. Similarly, Jesus is seen to be *offering* himself as God’s instrument. He becomes the door, the way, only in that he acts as the *conduit* between humanity and salvation; *he* is not salvation itself, only God is that, just as Jesus is not “I AM” but can exploit the rights of the ‘son’ in employing the phrase to suit his cause!

*Then I said, 'Here I am'; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.*

Ps 40:7–8

By following so closely the traditional depiction of the ‘trouble at sea’ scenario, the FG author has already implied that it is God who is in control of the situation, not Jesus. Further, by employing the “I AM” phrase, Jesus is merely reminding his disciples that God is *present* in everything he does, and that if they only pay attention and follow him, Israel will be redeemed: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1).

Still, though, there is dissension amongst his followers. Jesus reiterates the ‘raising of the son of man’ concept, referring to Isaiah’s declaration that “All [their] children shall be taught by the Lord” (Isa 54:13) but the original version continues: “and great shall be the prosperity of your children.” In other words, you may not see the change you want in your own lifetime but if you return to God, your descendants will reap the benefits! Returning to God means following Jesus’ lead and this, allegorically, is what is depicted during the feeding and sea ‘signs’.

Before we continue with the FG’s story, I must interject with perhaps the most provocative suggestion of this entire book. Let’s go over the two main ‘signs’ of John 6 again but this time in light of some *external* evidence. The following section is based on research that accumulated over several years and only subsequently became such a powerful potential ‘truth’ that I had to admit I was convinced.

The Tumult

At this juncture we are going to start challenging the FG’s version of events, blended as it is with a strong sense of theological idealism. After many years of intimate study of this gospel, it became necessary for me to accept that the Jesus’ was a rather turbulent mission, with both a degree of violence and a sense of malevolence, though directed at a specific target, not at people generally. Subtle clue after subtle clue emerged until I was in no doubt that Jesus’ actions were, indeed, recorded elsewhere than in the Bible. What I discovered, if you are willing to suspend your disbelief until the end of this analysis, is a Jesus of history chronicled in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the works of Flavius Josephus (not in the two passages that refer to “Jesus the Christ”), and other Jewish documents. This isn’t the Jesus of Christian tradition. Be warned.

Let’s just recap.

Jesus is apparently prophet, king, *and* high priest; he is a man of Josephite heritage, who often returns to the northern territories when his

rebellious tactics in Judea get him into trouble. His demonstration in the temple in Jerusalem is a violent protest against the incumbent priests. He is enticing many away. He has attempted to convince the Samaritans that Mount Gerizim is not the sanctified locus of worship for the god of Abraham and, at least once, he is depicted as observing a Samaritan-style Passover in a place that is mentioned in prophecies concerning the ideal future and the reinstatement of the northern kingdom (i.e., Bashan). He has admitted to being the ‘one’ whom the Samaritans see as their messiah, i.e., the one who would come to restore Samaria to its rightful place as firstborn, but he sets his sights on the “ruler’s sceptre” that is somehow linked to the ancient site of Shiloh. According to the Messiah ben Joseph tradition, he must bring about the downfall, or “death” of the procurator. By assimilating his mission with the expected Samaritan Taheb, he insinuates he has possession of (or knows the whereabouts of) the Ark of the Covenant, one of the foundational tenets of the Taheb tradition.

Reviewing the evidence of John 6 in terms of historical references, or clues, we can deduce the following:

- ★ Jesus is up a mountain “*near*” the time of Passover.
- ★ A vast group accompanies him.
- ★ There is a strongly Samaritan flavour to the scene.
- ★ Jesus conducts a symbolic version of the Passover, insinuating that he has come to unite the tribes, one of the fundamental tasks of the Taheb.
- ★ The crowd becomes zealous in their support and Jesus *fears* them, i.e., when he realises they are “about to come and take him by force to make him king” he flees, alone.
- ★ The disciples also leave.
- ★ Sometime during the voyage Jesus reveals himself, presumably having hidden in the boat to avoid detection (no one sees him board the boat).
- ★ He offers assurances that all is well.
- ★ An unexplained and unspecified number of boats set sail from Tiberias, the Roman stronghold, in search of Jesus.
- ★ There are, apparently two factions to the crowd, i.e., one on the Bashan side, and one on the Capernaum side (John 6:22).
- ★ Some of the former group take boats and join the hunt for Jesus.

Now take a look at one of the most controversial passages from Josephus, which a *few* scholars have posited *might* relate to Jesus, though they fail to find enough supporting evidence to justify such a late date for his ultimate crucifixion:

But the nation of the Samaritans did not escape without tumults. The man who excited them to it, was one who thought lying a thing of little consequence, and who contrived everything so that the multitude might be pleased; so he bade them get together upon mount Gerizzim (*sic*), which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them that, when they were come hither, he would show them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there. So they came thither armed, and thought the discourse of the man probable; and as they abode at a certain village, which was called Tirathaba, they got the rest together to them, and desired to go up the mountain in a great multitude together. But Pilate prevented their going up, by seizing upon the roads with a great band of horsemen and footmen, who fell upon those who were gotten together in the village; and when they came to an action, some of them they slew, and others of them they put to flight, and took a great many alive, the principal of whom, and also the most potent of those that fled away, Pilate ordered to be slain.

But when this tumult was appeased, the Samaritan senate sent an embassy to Vitellius....

Ant. 18.4.1

This Samaritan tumult occurs during the Passover of 36 CE, the very year we see Jesus storming the temple in Jerusalem (as described in “Temple Tirade”). The similarities between Josephus’ tumult and the mountaintop scene in John 6 are striking even at this early stage of the comparison:

- ★ Both men are up a mountain at Passover.
- ★ There is obviously a strong Samaritan context.
- ★ The crowd is portrayed as a ‘multitude’ that has two distinct factions (one group arrives then more join them).
- ★ Romans intervene.
- ★ The leader of the Samaritans flees, along with some of his followers.

A couple of other things need mentioning: 1) Josephus goes on to describe how the Samaritans claim they were not revolting against Rome but that they had gone to Tirathaba to “escape the violence of Pilate” and 2) the multitude is armed. In claiming that they are attempting to escape the hostility of Pilate, the Samaritans *can* claim they carry weapons for purposes of self-defence (which is permissible) but nothing is mentioned about why they should fear retribution just for going up their own mountain. They are allowed to do so under normal circumstances.

The multitudinous gathering itself, however, would spark concern and would require careful monitoring but, just as the huge gatherings in

Jerusalem at Passover, it would probably be tolerated *if* there were no more to it. A claim to the Ark, the original validation of the Israelite priesthood, however, would *certainly* be reason for heightened security, especially if informants from the temple institution, who want to maintain the *status quo* and appease the Romans, have informed the Romans of the potential danger of this gathering. Judging by the Jews' (attempted) manipulative exploitation of Pilate's conscience during the arrest scenario, it would be in keeping. There is a hint of this in the subsequent verses of John 6, yet to be discussed, where Jesus first accuses one of his own men of being a "devil."

We must realise that this is Josephus' perspective on the event. As one wholly connected with the 'blind' who fail to comprehend Jesus' message and intent (i.e., the Pharisees), he sees only the bandit, the troublemaker apparently trying to reinstate Mount Gerizim but, as in the FG, what the Pharisees presume to know is not necessarily the truth. We must recall from our earlier discussions, however, that one of the functions of the Samaritan Taheb *was* to release the Ark from its hiding place (beneath the mountain), to prepare for the coming of the (Davidic) messiah. Josephus' account of the tumult, therefore, reaffirms that the rebel Jesus is assuming that role; there is no other renegade or pretender to this position who fits (again, a post-Jesus augmentation to the Taheb description should be considered).

Jesus has been trying to return people to the *original* way of worship, and his mission has included threats to the temple in Jerusalem, and not just verbal threats. He has been saying much the same thing in Samaria, from the moment he met Mary at the well. Although the Gerizim temple itself has been razed, there is still a cleansing that must be done before the people can worship according to Torah.

When Moses tells Joshua what he must do when he leads the Israelites into the Promised Land, one of the *first* duties is to "demolish completely" all the extant sacred sites "on the mountain height," so that worship of the one god of Israel can be untainted (Deut 12:2f). They must be wary of assimilation and imitation, and if they manage this, they will be granted a paradise wherein God will reside, and they will 'eat' with him in peace and prosperity. Jesus, it seems, is leading a party of followers *against* the reinstatement of the tainted site of Gerizim, *not* in an effort to re-establish it. This is, in part, why we soon see some of his following change their minds and reject him.

I suggest that the very subtle reference back in John 4:45, i.e., to "the Galileans" having seen and heard Jesus at the festival and thereafter supporting his mission, might offer a clue as to why there is a second wave of followers and why the crowd is armed. What if the Galileans are the troublemakers in this scenario?

Judas the Galilean, along with a Pharisee called Zadok, founded the

Galilean sect, otherwise known as the Zealots, in c. 6 CE. They held that God alone was the ruler of Israel and incited the Jews to rebel against the payment of taxes to Rome; Josephus blames them for the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. I suggest this group is certainly involved in the Samaritan tumult, and I propose this is why Luke later refers to them:

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?”

Luke 13:1

Their blood was “mingled with their sacrifices” because the massacre occurred at the time of the Passover celebrations.

The question then becomes: Does Jesus *know* that these men are armed? (Compare the scene, much later in John 18:10–11, where Peter wields a sword and yet Jesus doesn’t seem in the least surprised). Is *Jesus* armed, as he was for the temple demonstration? Or is it possible Jesus is at Tirathaba (see below) and it is this second crowd, led by the Galileans, which makes the march up Mount Gerizim? This would suggest Jesus has lost control of the throng. He would be seen as the instigator, the ringleader, but the clash with the Romans could well be down to the zealous Galileans who had heard him at the festival denouncing Jerusalem’s elite and had latched onto his cause, only to usurp its momentum for their own agenda. It is a feasible interpretation of the evidence.

Musings on Josephus

Josephus’ account of the Samaritan leader and the supposed whereabouts of the Ark is an oddity, for Moses never crossed the Jordan. This seems almost *too* blatant an error for the Jewish historian to make. Is he merely passing on a rumour he has *heard* and is thus having a sarcastic dig at the Samaritans’ apparent gullibility, is he protecting something/someone, or can we really admit that he is so much in error?

Also, one small factor creates a most intriguing conundrum: Why does the village where the multitude meet (before attempting to ascend the mountain) have a Hindu name? Tirathaba is a composite of:

<i>Tirath</i>	+	<i>aba</i>
Hindu for “sacred place”	+	father
i.e., “sacred place of the father”		

As you can imagine, several thoughts sprung to mind. I imagined Jesus on his travels, sitting with the holy men of India or some such place, learning the word they might have used for their own, personal retreats. Was *tirath* the word for his guru's sacred place? By extension, perhaps, when we see Jesus, in John 6 going up the mountain to sit and think, does he stop at his own 'sacred place' that subsequently becomes known as 'the sacred place of the father', i.e., *Jesus*' special retreat?

Or, on a much more profound and exciting level, could this be a place so named by Jesus himself because he knew it to be a sacred place already, that is, the sacred place of the Father (as used in the FG), God. Could this be something to do with the location of the Ark (as implied by Josephus)?

I also wondered if there might have been any confusion in Josephus' recording of that name. It appears nowhere else, so cross-referencing is impossible. However, there is a potential connection between Tirathaba and Timnath-serah, which, remember, means "portion/manifestation of the remnant." The latter name I deduced to be that of the burial place of Joseph, otherwise referred to as Sychar in the FG; this village lies north of Mount Gerizim. Could Joseph's bones be buried near or even *with* the Ark? The same Hebrew word *arown* is used to describe both his ossuary *and* the Ark of the Covenant. I have another theory about the site of the Ark that I present in "How Many Cubits?", so I am not claiming that I have the definitive answer to this conundrum; it simply shows how much more there is to seemingly superficial material and how much you can glean from titbits of information if you keep an open mind. I find such delving into new territory stimulating and enriching and if it helps others make new connections and new discoveries, then they are well worth the risk of derision.

We need to remember the Samaritan perspective; the Ark was, by divine edict, hidden beneath the mountain, awaiting the arrival of the Taheb. As the divine essence resided in the Ark, one might say anywhere the Ark is must be the 'sacred place of the Father'.

Another Version

Making this whole situation even more intriguing, is the strange but profoundly similar account in 2 Esdras, which is linked to a vision of a man walking on water (i.e., coming out of the sea):

I looked and saw that an innumerable multitude of people were gathered together ... to make war against the man ... he carved out for himself a great mountain, and flew up on to it ... I tried to see the region or place from which the mountain was carved, but I could not ... I saw that all who gathered against him ... were filled with fear, and yet they dared to fight ... he sent forth from his mouth something like

a stream of fire ... and burned up all of them ... I was amazed ... After this I saw the man come down from the mountain and call to himself another multitude that was peaceable ... many people came to him ... some of them were bound, and some were bringing others as offerings
2 Esd 13:5–13

This is uncanny. The 2 Esdras parallel further suggests that this man is called the “son of God” and the peaceable multitude represents the gathered northern tribes!

In each version of the Samaritan tumult, then, a man goes up a mountain and is set upon by hostile forces but in the FG and 2 Esdras, after he comes down (indicating the first mountain, i.e., Mount Gerizim, is *not* the site of his reign) there is peace. Shiloh, the ‘peaceful’ site of the new house of God, is the new centre of divine worship, e.g., the bringing of sacrifices (“bound”) and converts (“others as offerings”).⁵

In Josephus’ telling of the event, the man who leads the Samaritans apparently claims that he can retrieve the Ark of the Covenant—and in 2 Esdras, the figure on the mountain breathes out fire (‘a storm of sparks’) that consumes the enemy: “And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died ... And Aaron was silent” (Lev 10:2–3).

This type of “fire” comes *only* from the Ark, i.e., the Shekinah. Possession of the Ark is implicit in all three accounts.

*Rule in the midst of your foes. Your people will
offer themselves willingly on the day
you lead your forces on the holy mountains.
... “You are a priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek.”
Ps 110: 2–4*

Cover up?

Now we have reason to question the motivations and accuracy of the FG author for the first time but there is nothing sinister in the fact that he has chosen to steer his readers away from the historical ‘truth’ and toward the

⁵ In the Vatican archives is a document referred to as *Acti Pilati* (Pilate’s report to Caesar), which, though of doubtful origin, and probably a Christian artefact, does offer a strange corroboration of the Shiloh link: “One day,” Pilate supposedly writes, “in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed in the midst of the group a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude.” That the document goes on to say this man was golden-haired, celestial, and “about thirty years of age” really gives the game away, but one has to wonder why Siloe/Shiloh was mentioned, if there was not a valid and significant connection in *some* tradition or other.

spiritual lessons he is duty bound to disseminate. I suggest that John 6 was written as an *ideal*, symbolic account of Jesus' dynamic and precipitate 'sign'. The author shifts the Passover scenario to the evocative mountains of Bashan (thus he is able to exploit the significant scriptural precedents) and he makes Jesus' escape seem like a blessed 'miracle', but he retains enough veracity in the subtle details to make his account an honest one. For those 'with eyes to see', yet again, the truth is there: Jesus *does* go up a mountain, there *is* a huge crowd with him, Romans *do* arrive, there *is* a sense of matters spiralling out of control, and he and the disciples *do* flee.

I think the account of Jesus appearing to the disciples by standing on the sea, although a general allusion to the power of God to overcome the enemy, etc., is also to be understood as the moment Jesus lets his disciples know that he has not been captured or killed. That is their fear, which is why they react so when Jesus reveals himself, i.e., they think him one of those killed by the Romans. The sudden storm thus alludes to the arrival of the soldiers and the chaos that ensues.

If John 6 reveals evidence of the Samaritan tumult recorded by Josephus, paralleled in 2 Esdras, and hinted at in Luke and Mark, so many parts of the puzzle that make up the enigmatic Gospel of John fall into place. Similarly, the *augmented* Messiah ben Joseph tradition as a potentially post-Jesus phenomenon becomes more probable, and the glaring dichotomy between the FG and the Synoptics (e.g., the positioning of the storming of the temple scene within the narratives) is resolved.

Perhaps Lazarus could not justify describing the actual event, for the reality is so damaging to Jesus' supposed identity and mission. How could it be recorded that he failed to keep his 'sheep' safe, that he didn't foresee such an outcome, that he didn't manage to control the crowd—that he fled, alone. I think it is a case of damage limitation; the author takes the most important elements and reshapes the storyline.

I argue, therefore, that it is for this reason we are given two distinct 'years' in the FG, and several other calendrical clues throughout; we can deduce the timeline (historical context) of the gospel for ourselves if we wish to. The Romans and the Samaritans, at the very least, would chronicle the historical record of this highly turbulent year, 36 CE. Indeed, there is further corroboration of this date later in the gospel, during Jesus' arrest scenes.

Here is a summary of the various accounts of the same (I claim) 'tumult':

2 Macc 2:4–7 (Jeremiah)

The prophet goes up the mountain where Moses is said to have viewed the Promised Land before dying. He takes with him the tabernacle, the ark, and the altar. These he places in a cave

dwelling and seals them in. A crowd who try to locate the hiding place follows him. He gets angry with them and tells them off, saying the sacred objects will remain hidden until the ‘ingathering’ is complete and ‘mercy’ is shown to Israel.

2 Esdras

The figure carves out a mountain for himself and ascends it. Many people pursue him; the mood is one of fear and anger. The exact location of the mountain is unknown (“unseen”). The man rebukes them. They are killed. He comes down the mountain and acquires a great following. He seems to inaugurate a new temple.

Messiah ben Joseph Tradition

He will be responsible for the downfall of the procurator (see “Josephus,” below). His followers will rally to his defence and a force referred to as Armilus will kill many.

Gospel of John

Jesus has impressed the sect of the Galileans, a zealot group of revolutionaries. He goes up a mountain. He comments on the crowd following him. He performs a sign during a Passover celebration that excites the crowd so much they attempt to force him to be their ‘king’. Romans come from Tiberias, e.g., to quell the commotion. Jesus flees and hides, avoiding capture. He speaks in the synagogue about his flesh and blood in a context of victory in battle. There is dissention within his following for the first time. At his arrest, Jesus refers to the bravery of his followers who would fight if they were there. There is clear evidence Pilate is concerned how Rome will perceive this situation.

Gospel of Luke

Pilate is said to mingle the blood of many Galileans with their sacrifices.

Gospel of Mark

Judas Barabbas is murdered during “the *insurrection*.”

Josephus

The man gathers a great multitude and tells them he will show them the sacred objects that Moses hid under Mount Gerizim.

They become excited and call even more together at a village nearby. They are armed. As they all ascend the mountain, the Romans intervene and a great slaughter of Samaritans results. Many escape, including the ringleader, but they are tagged for execution if caught. The incident is the primary cause of Pilate's extradition back to Rome, i.e., the 'man', *in effect*, 'slays' Pilate.

11

STUMBLING BLOCKS

Flesh and Blood

GETTING BACK TO THE FG'S SEQUENCE of events, Jesus, back in relatively safe Capernaum, is teaching in the synagogue, reiterating the concept of the previous 'sign' and referring to his "flesh and blood." This proves to be a difficult lesson. The pragmatists in the crowd hear in Jesus' words an apparent order to eat his body and drink his blood and they balk at this, for such an idea is anathema to a true Israelite. Not only would this constitute cannibalism of course, it flies in the face of the law, as expressed quite emphatically, in Lev 17:14, i.e., no one is to consume blood, on pain of excommunication. The blood of every living creature 'is its life' and this belongs to God; when an animal is slaughtered *for sacrifice*, its blood must be given to the priest so that he can then offer it up to God.¹

It is important to link this passage to the previous two incidents, i.e., the feeding in Bashan *and* the boat on the Sea, which is why the author does not tell us right until the end that the synagogue scene is actually distinct. This, I suggest, is what *really* makes Jesus' analogy come to life:

Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. *You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth* —of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. You shall eat fat until you are filled, and drink blood until you are drunk ... I will restore the fortunes of Jacob ... they shall know that I

¹ In Jesus' day, Passover sacrifices (for Jews) are to be made at the temple in Jerusalem, for the 'tent of meeting' no longer exists; if the crowd are to start slaughtering livestock up on the Golan Heights, even a Samaritan (who would normally insist that the blood be offered up to God on Mount Gerizim) would be disconcerted; but the FG gets around this by having (dried) fish and bread, rather than sheep (no blood is let).

am the Lord their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them to their own land. I will leave none of them behind.

Ezek 39:17–20, 25, 28

The sacrificial feast here, though intended for the birds and wild animals is, in effect, a feast for the celebration of God's return and his eradication of the oppressors and enemies of Israel; the house of Jacob will "live securely in their land" once more, having witnessed the downfall of the mighty. Of course, this is made contingent upon Israel's return to God, which is the focus of the Jesus' mission. Immediately after this declaration, the prophet is transported to a "very high mountain" "in the land of Israel" and is given the vision of the ideal temple where *all Israel* will worship and where only the pure in "heart and flesh" will administer. In Ezek 39:11 the location of this conquest and celebration is called the "Valley of the Travellers, east of the sea"; "travellers" is translated from the Hebrew verb *abar*, meaning "to pass over, through, or by, pass on" and so the site is identified by many as the Abarim region—exactly where Jesus had been previously, offering Passover, and pertinent to the discussion of John 6:25–40 and the allusions to Moses.

The point is, this is *revolutionary* talk. When John affirms Jesus' bridegroom role in John 3, the insinuation is that rebellion is in the air; the same is being inferred here, and this has a bearing, later, on Jesus' legal standing during his interrogation by Annas. He is saying all this *publicly* but in such a way that only those who 'read between the lines' can grasp his meaning; the rest, taking him literally, rather than perceiving the metaphor, simply think he is mad, but this is all part of the winnowing process, according to the FG author.

"Share in the sacrificial feast," Jesus is saying, "eat the flesh and the blood, for it is mine". Jesus is not saying he is the physical sacrifice, for he never *actually* becomes (or *intends* to become) one. The context of Ezekiel 39 implies that the sacrifice is the *enemy* and this is a foreshadowing of what seems to happen in the FG. Taking Jesus literally simply does not work; it is nonsense without the context of the feeding, and the suppression-of-the-enemy themes. The flesh and blood is 'his' by possession, by spiritual conquest, not 'his' personally. Share in Jesus' victory, and you share in the kingdom of 'life', the kingdom of true worship and the will of God. Eat the flesh and drink the blood that belongs to the victor, and you assume the rights of the "son of man," i.e., you become one with the firstborn. The firstborn reinstated will live "forever." Jesus then asks, "what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where he was before?" The Remnant of Joseph, once the elect of God, has fallen into a desperate state but will soon "rise" to its rightful status again. This, at least, is the theological interpretation.

When you read these passages with the Samaritan tumult in mind, however, you get the sense that Jesus is referring to the near-miss he and his disciples have just had. Remember that there is a certain warlike nature to the Messiah ben Joseph, and the FG's Jesus is depicted in terms of aggression, either directly or indirectly, on more than one occasion (e.g., the temple scene, the fact that one of his disciples carries a weapon, and when arrested, he claims his followers would fight if present). Although "anointed for battle," perhaps Jesus simply doesn't have what it takes and the sheer overwhelming zeal of the crowd, ready to do *real* battle then and there, is too much for him. His strangely disturbing words echo the violence and confusion of the massacre on the mountain.

It is after the slaying of the Samaritans and Galileans on Mount Gerizim, which seems to be the *true* locale for the Passover of John 6 (remember, the *alluded to* setting of Bashan is the FG author's theological/symbolic construct, in an effort to detach Jesus from the debacle whilst being true to his duty to chronicle the movement), that many of Jesus' followers realise they have made an error in judgement and detach themselves from his following. With apparent hints of an impending bloody battle and sacrifice, so soon after the Samaritan tumult, those who walk away may simply decide they don't wish to sacrifice their own flesh and blood for someone who ran away at the first sign of trouble.

Peter

After Peter's introduction in John 1, the nature of his character established, nothing is said of him *directly*, until John 6:68. Perhaps he is now convinced that Jesus' revolution may be the way to secure a higher position, as he now seems to be a disciple; however, we will soon learn that he is merely hedging his bets.

Having been rejected by "many of his disciples," Jesus asks the "twelve" if any of *them* wish to leave and Peter, ever the apparently keen one, responds vehemently, claiming to "believe" Jesus is the chosen one of God. To this alleged confession Jesus responds by accusing one of them of being a "devil"; a strange response one may think but not so strange if we remember what "Cephas" implies, i.e., Peter is not trustworthy until he has proven himself contrite and humble. John 6:71 is probably an addendum because it draws attention away from the obvious suspect; it exonerates Peter by blaming Judas, illustrating a Christian perspective, not that of the FG. Besides, later in the gospel, Judas is said to be strongly influenced by the "devil," suggesting someone else holds this title within the narrative.

This caution regarding Peter is retained in Matt 16:23: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are setting your mind

not on divine things but on human things.” Paul, too, has no high opinion of Peter, as is evidenced in Gal 2:11f, where Peter is rejected as a hypocrite who is too easily swayed by the circumstances in which he finds himself, rather than adhering to the path Jesus has, supposedly, set for him. As far as the FG is concerned, Peter is vying for a more superior position within the group but he is influenced by the machinations of someone in particular; just as in his depiction as the “lame man” unable to make progress of his own volition, he soon comes to rely on a stronger personality in his bid to rise in the ranks.

Jesus is, by now, fully aware that he is under scrutiny. According to the narrative, “emissaries” follow him wherever he goes; first at Bethany/Bethabara, then Aenon, now Tiberias. Is there someone amongst his disciples who is acting the mole? Could it be Peter?

Confusion

The pep talk Jesus seems to have given his disciples has fallen on a few deaf ears. He is hesitant to return to the south, where he is a wanted man. He feels pushed into things, claiming that his “time” has not “yet come”; determined, his closest allies try to coerce him into appearing again in public, i.e., “no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world” (John 7:4). “If you are who you say you are, prove it,” in other words. *Who* would say such a thing? Jesus is in hiding; he had slipped away from the crowd on the mountain in secret, now he enters Judea in secret (John 7:10). For such a self-acclaimed authority he doesn’t seem overly confident at this point.

The Festival of Tabernacles is the site of Jesus’ next appearance in Jerusalem. The instructions for the celebration appear in Deuteronomy 26–27; there is an offering of first fruits, which is ritualized by the recital of the saving acts of God. A reminder of the pre-Egyptian heritage of Israel, including the ‘signs and wonders’ that freed the nation from oppression is given, and the need to “observe [the] statutes and ordinances” of God if the nation and the Promised Land are to be “holy” is emphasized.

The temple of Solomon was originally dedicated at this festival, emphasizing Jesus’ intentions even more, perhaps. In his prayer of dedication for the new temple, Solomon makes the future of the religious institution, i.e., the “throne of Israel,” contingent upon the nation’s heartfelt adherence to the divine law (1 Kgs 8:25). In the subsequent response from God, this conditional arrangement is reiterated in terms of integrity and uprightness (9:4). So long as they deserve it, in other words, the line of David will sit on the throne; if they stray from the chosen path, they forfeit their right to rule. Such a concept is vital to understanding the FG’s allusions to

kingship later in the gospel; it is a very subtle threat that has potential ramifications for the entire establishment.

Jesus' reputation precedes him and the crowd talk of him amongst themselves, though secretly for fear of the Jews (confirming the distinction between the authorities, i.e., the Jews, and the general public). The FG says that *about* "the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach" (John 7:14). As the celebrations last seven days (Deut 16:13–15), Jesus probably makes his appearance on the *third* day, a symbolically charged moment.

At the very beginning of the gospel Jesus had called Nicodemus the "teacher of Israel"; this title was originally attributed to the priests (Deut 33:10) but subsequently usurped by the Pharisees. Jesus is now assuming the function of teacher, taking *back* from the Pharisees what they had claimed illegitimately. Here he goes again! This is why the Jews are so "astonished"; Jesus is not a priest as far as they are concerned, neither is he a Pharisee, so how can he claim to teach Israel? He has not received the training they have received, so why is it he seems to know so much? The teaching Jesus offers, though, is not (according to the FG) some personal belief or agenda but the "word of God."

*Whom will he teach knowledge
...to whom will he explain the message?
Isa 28:9*

Getting a little more daring, Jesus openly accuses the Jews of threatening him with death but it is the crowd, the general public, who answers: "You have a demon (i.e., must be mad), who is trying to kill you?" (John 7:20). Jesus is revealing the wicked intentions of the authorities, just in case anything happens; with everyone aware that he is in fear of his life, which of the Jews would be so rash as to try anything? Another riot is the last thing they want. Jesus adds the subtle warning: "I have not come on my own"; although on one level this could allude to the authority of "the Father" that is in him, as in John 16:32 (but that has a different context), it is also a statement of caution, in that he does still have followers who are willing to fight on his word.

Jesus' justification for 'healing' a "man's whole body" is phrased in terms of the circumcision of Moses (the significance of which the author of the subsequent addendum is obviously uncertain). This is not to say Moses *gave* Israel circumcision but that he, himself, was saved from death *by* circumcision (Exod 24:24–6). If the law permits this 'saving' ritual on the Sabbath, Jesus' 'saving' act should be just as permissible. Besides, there is a pliable, more practical and sympathetic interpretation of the Sabbath laws,

an interpretation Jesus alludes to when he says, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement” (John 7:24):

If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord.

Isa 58:13–14

Jesus believes he is doing the work of God, honouring this holy day by bringing the lost souls back to the righteous path. How can any but the ‘wicked’ themselves say this is wrong?²

Once more, there is total confusion about who Jesus is. Is he the messiah after all? Are the authorities trying to keep it quiet? Some believe, some do not. Escaping arrest, Jesus’ effect on the Jews is clear, for they are not simply querying what Jesus means when he says they will not find him where he is going, they are making a *promise*. That is, Jesus will *have* to go and teach to the “the Dispersion among the Greeks” (by this is meant the Israelites scattered beyond Palestine) if they are not to find him, for they have spies everywhere. Yet, is this not exactly what the FG is all about? The sending of a message to the scattered Israelites is *just* what Jesus *is* interested in, so this proves to be one of several instances where the truth (Jesus’ truth) is placed on the lips of the unwitting antagonists of the gospel.

On the last day of the festival, the seventh day, again a day of special symbolic significance, and the day on which the Feast of Tabernacles includes the most number of priests, Jesus cries out, as if in desperation (the Greek verb *krazo* in John 7:37 implies a forceful exclamation and is used elsewhere, such as in Rev 21:4 and Heb 5:7, to denote a cry of lamentation, or a supplication): “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.”

Those who turn away from God, so we learn from Jeremiah, forsake the “living water” and perish, whilst those who “trust in the Lord” grow strong and prosper even in the wilderness, for they have set their “roots” in the saving “stream” (Jer 17:7–18). The passage goes on to recount the

² The Samaritans (and the Essenes) are known for being even more rigid in the definition and observance of Sabbath than the Pharisees, and right from the opening of the gospel we have seen that Jesus observes *some* form of Sabbath, i.e., the Day of Atonement he spends indoors, in John 1:39. The Samaritans have their own bi-annual calendar that is calculated from the meridian of Gerizim; the Talmud tells of the Samaritans vandalizing the Jewish beacon system that is meant to inform those in outlying areas of the time of the Sabbath. So, it *may* be that, as far as Jesus is concerned, he is not profaning the ‘true’ Sabbath at all.

conviction of the prophet, whose role as “shepherd” has led him into the snares of his persecutors but he refuses to give up in the face of adversity. The hope is that God will vindicate the prophet and turn his judgement upon the unbelievers.

Jesus is addressing a body of priests but note what he says next: “let the one who believes in me drink.” Who is “the one”? Jesus has singled out one person in particular. He is searching for his new protégée, the boy promised to him up in Cana, i.e., Lazarus. He must now be a (trainee) priest and Jesus is ready to make the most of his promise to Nicodemus, especially since being disappointed with Philip’s lack of understanding.³

*I will surely gather ... the survivors of Israel;
I will set them together like sheep in a fold.
... The one who breaks out will go up before them;
they will break through ... the gate, going out by it.
Their king will pass on before them, the Lord at their head.
Mic 2:12–13*

This passage from Micah anticipates Jesus’ monologue concerning the gate and the sheep in John 10 but more significantly, it alludes to the formal arrival into the narrative of this special character. In John 11 we learn that Lazarus is the main reason many of the Jews convert, so in effect, he leads them out, i.e., they follow his example.

It is in these FG passages, however, that Jesus’ Davidic heritage is so clearly questioned (John 7:42). The scriptures say that the messiah will be from the house of David but Jesus is “from Galilee,” i.e., from the reviled northern tribes—how can this be?

Nicodemus 2

The gospel reintroduces Nicodemus in this, the second stage of his story. In a clever allusion to the words spoken by John back in 1:26 (“Among you stands one whom you do not know”), Nicodemus, presented as one amongst the chief priests and Pharisees (“one of them”), has truly become one whom they will soon not recognise, for his loyalties to the sect are failing. In their caustic response, “Has any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?” (7:48), the Pharisees once again reveal their ignorance, for of course there *are* converts and Nicodemus will be a prime example! They simply do

³ Young priests were initiated into general duties when they reached physical maturity, i.e., at age thirteen or soon thereafter. Official serving duties were undertaken at the age of twenty (Talmud Bavli Hullin 24b).

not see.

Nicodemus uses his influence, while he still has some, to allow Jesus some leeway: “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” the Pharisees’ retort is sarcastic but unwittingly correct, i.e., they infer that if Nicodemus can say such a thing he must be “from Galilee” too (i.e., a Jesus supporter). They tell him to “search” and “see” that no prophet is to come from Galilee. (Of course, the subsequent Messiah ben Joseph tradition stipulates that he shall begin his work in Galilee, but this part of the tradition arises *from* Jesus, it does not anticipate him, so I suggest). As self-acclaimed masters of Torah, they demonstrate their supposed knowledge of the scriptures but the FG author has the upper hand, for the *only* OT precedent for the saying “search and you will see” is in 2 Kgs 10:23. There, Jehu stands, disguised, amongst the Baal worshippers; his intention is to destroy their temple and to return Israel to the worship of the ‘true’ god. The Pharisees thus have the truth of Jesus’ intention placed, yet again, upon their lips, i.e., he is to cleanse (“destroy”) the defiled locus of worship through the destruction of the current cultus.

Nicodemus is, indeed, from Galilee, from Capernaum, as we now know from John 4. He is also a convert to Jesus’ ministry. He is biding his time, using his status and position as an ‘insider’ to help the cause. However, his audacity here anticipates his next appearance, where he is threatened with punishment should he openly confess his allegiance to Jesus.

12

ADULTERESS

Mary's Trial

THE GOSPEL CONTINUES WITH THE depiction of the Samaritan woman, Mary; as the woman who is in an illicit union with her sixth and unsanctioned 'husband' she is committing adultery in the eyes of God. The footnote in the NRSV suggests that the most ancient authorities lack 7:53–8:11, or that it appears elsewhere in the narrative (which is intriguing given that the FG chronology can be questioned) but its conformity to the rest of the FG is so uniform, it would be an uncanny addendum. It fulfils the very next stage in Ezekiel 16's portrait of the divine bride, where she passes from infidelity to the public show of guilt: "I will judge you as women who commit adultery They shall bring up a mob against you and they shall stone you" (Ezek 16:38–40).

There can be little doubt that the story of John 7:53–8:11 echoes that of Susanna (in the Additions to the Book of Daniel, especially vv. 34–41). There is a similar element of catching a woman in the act of committing adultery; there are 'elders' present in both scenarios; there is a strong desire to put both women to death even before their trials; there is a reticence in each of the two leading male characters (Daniel and Jesus) to partake in the judgement; in each case the woman is acquitted; and in each the accusers are left with the guilt.

The Samaritan version of Susanna's story is known as "The Daughter of Amram." She is a Nazarite and two men falsely accuse her. It is worth noting that the name Amram comes from Exod 6:20, i.e., the father of Moses, Aaron and, in the Samaritan version of the LXX, Miriam. This is understood by current scholars to be a devised genealogy set down by the priestly sources of the text, in order to underscore the importance of Moses by giving him Israelite/priestly status. Thus, for the Susanna story, the woman is the daughter of a priest, where Amram is a representation of the priesthood (a commission name); although she is unnamed, the link to Miriam in Exodus makes it probable this name is inferred. She is the daughter not of any priest, but of the *high priest*.

According to the Qur'an, Amram is also the father of "Mary, Jesus' mother." If we allow for the Muslim interpretation of the Christian story to be influenced more by the dominant Synoptic version of events, we can ask with impunity: What if this Mary was actually the Magdalene? That would make Amram, Jesus, for by taking her under his wing, as the 'rod' of Ephraim, as the future wife of his 'adopted' son, or protégée, Lazarus, Jesus becomes, in effect, her father (in law). Unless Amram is truly Mary Magdalene's Samaritan father, a name not deemed important enough even for the FG to mention, let alone the Synoptics, it makes much more sense for this to be an epithet for Jesus, the man *assuming* high-priestly status.

A mediaeval Samaritan document, known as the "Chronicle of Abu'l Fath" contains a similar tale of a high priest who is *tested* for his impartiality as judge by certain men who falsely accuse his daughter, believing that he will use his authority to free her despite the charges. This daughter is named Maryam. The priest manages to reverse the focus of the accusations by openly challenging the credibility of the witnesses and accusers. Here too, the woman is not condemned.

According to Jewish law, a woman accused of infidelity, whether caught in the act or not, is to be presented before the *priest* for judgement (Num 5:13). If we accept this woman of the FG is Mary Magdalene, Jesus' apparently self-acclaimed priestly status is being *tested*, just as in the Samaritan documents.

In the account of adultery described in Deut 22:13–21, the focus on a woman's lack of virginity, her supposed 'prostitution' *and* her being potentially slandered by false accusations, emphasizes the *father's* role, not so much the husband's, which offers us another clue to Jesus' relationship with Mary, i.e., he is to be seen as a father, or father-in-law figure. However, in order for Mary to *be* accused (even falsely), she must already be married or betrothed (for as the woman is considered the legal property of the man, it is he who is considered wronged in such cases); the 'rods' of Ephraim and Judah were both *chosen* in John 4, but were they united (in the 'biblical' sense)?

This is where things start to get (even more) complicated. Unravelling the dual nature of the FG, with its intentional double meanings and apparently parallel stories, is something that has taken me many years, so it must be explained over several chapters. However, this story of the adulteress really brings home the confusion over whose wife she is meant to be. We have two ways of dealing with this situation:

★ Mary is presumed by the accusing Jews to be *Jesus'* second wife and now the young Lazarus suddenly appears on the scene, more her own age. A man having sexual intercourse with another man's wife incurs the death penalty

for *both* parties. The chances of something being misconstrued or intentionally fabricated are high, given the attitude of the Jews toward Jesus (and later Lazarus) throughout the gospel. If Jesus is the one cuckolded, then Lazarus and Mary must die (Deut 22:22–4).

★ If Mary is deemed Lazarus’ legal ‘property’ as his betrothed (or wife) then the accusation is probably that Jesus is the miscreant. If a man lies with his daughter-in-law (Lazarus is effectively an adopted son) both are to be put to death (Lev 20:12).

The vicious rumours and spiteful accusations, just as in the Susanna precedent, bring Mary face to face with Jesus, her alleged partner in crime but also her supposed confessor, her ‘father’, the alleged high priest. In either scenario, Jesus’ campaign is potentially nullified, for according to the law, *both* the man and the woman who commit adultery are to be stoned. Will Jesus place the blame on Lazarus, or will he take the blame himself? The Jews *anticipate* that the turbulent ‘priest’ can be dealt with swiftly using this potentially embarrassing and demeaning strategy.

The Retort

Beginning to perceive Jesus’ ambition and goal, it may be that a sparring contest ensues between Jesus and the men who present Mary to him—a contest of legalities, to see who can be caught out first (in John 8:7 we learn that the men persist in questioning Jesus, so there is obviously more going on than is immediately made evident). The accusers, for instance may begin by citing: “Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord” (Deut 23:2); or “... Judah was told, ‘Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom.’ And Judah said, ‘Bring her out, and let her be burned.’” (Gen 38:24). Either would infer that they realise why Mary is there, i.e., to bear Jesus’ child. The first would suggest a priestly prohibition, the second, father-in-law status but these are merely potential citations. However, in the Talmud (Mas. Yevamoth 37a, note 42), it is claimed that “the Samaritans did not observe all the laws of betrothal, and any Samaritan might be the issue of an illicit union between his father and a woman who had been legally betrothed to another man.” It may be that the Jews seek to prove the illegitimacy of any potential offspring.

Jesus might then reply with: “I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, and your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with whores, and sacrifice with temple prostitutes; thus a people without understanding comes to ruin” (Hos 4:14).

Some of the ancient versions of the FG include an additional phrase at John 4:8 not included in the text of the NRSV today; the addition implies that what Jesus inscribes in the soil *is* something to do with the “sins of each of them” (the accusers). Inflammatory and so fitting in the context of the corrupt priesthood, this scathing diatribe from Hosea seems a good candidate but there is an even better one:

The sin of Judah is written ... By your own act you shall lose the heritage that I gave you ... those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the earth, for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the LORD.

Jer 17:1

According to Jeremiah 17, the prophet is instructed to stand by the gates of Jerusalem and warn the sinners of Judah that if they do not change their ways and return to the divine law given them when they left Egypt, they risk losing *everything*. The stubbornness and pride of those who are deemed leaders is emphasized, with the result being a conspiracy against Jeremiah and the plan to bring false charges against him. The subsequent passages tell of God the potter and the use of clay; the next major scene in the FG, after that of the adulteress, involves Jesus’ use of clay to ‘heal’ the blind man.

Jesus’ first inscription clearly isn’t enough to do the job. What he continues to write in the dirt seems to take a while, for the amassed accusers leave “one by one” as he does so. Whatever precedent he chooses to illustrate his response to the allegations brought against Mary and/or him, they are powerful enough to make each and every one of the men turn tail.

There is another interesting precedent in Numbers. Here, we learn of the ritual of the “ordeal by the waters of bitterness” for the adulteress. The accused woman is brought before the *priest* and is subjected to a test whereby her innocence or guilt will be revealed. If she is proven guilty, her uterus will drop and she will never conceive. If innocent, she will be able to bear children. Again, the emphasis is on offspring:

Then the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD; the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take *some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle* and put it into the water ... ‘If no man has lain with you, if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while under your husband’s authority, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings the curse.... Then the priest shall put these curses in writing, and wash them off into the water of bitterness.

Num 5:11–31

Interestingly, this is the ritual we see Mary, Jesus' "mother" being subjected to in the *Protevangelion*, a Christian document that tells an intriguing version of the pregnancy and marriage of Jesus' supposed mother, and Joseph. I shall come back to this.

Rabbinic interpretation of this law during the final years of the Second Temple Period all but annuls the ritual of the bitter waters by the gate but in Jesus' day it is still in use. However, the test is only applicable to those *not* "caught in the act" (Num 5:13) and thereby obliged to prove their innocence. Can the FG's usage of the identical phrase be a reference to this precedent, i.e., there *are no* witnesses and the accusations are thus false? This would also confirm, again, that Jesus is being tested as a priest. Indeed, in John 8:13, the Pharisees declare that Jesus cannot act as his own witness, which really does support the idea that he, too is 'on trial' here.

Mary is brought before Jesus by two accusers (two witnesses, as required by law, i.e., another detail that will be echoed John 8:13–18 and again in the arrest scenes of the FG). Either they have brought her to Jesus, her *husband*, who is then duty bound to take her to the priest for trial and condemnation, or they are taking her to Jesus to test his self-proclaimed role as priest. Either way, Jesus is potentially placed in an untenable position; he must lose his two special disciples (and thus his child) to stoning, or he must nullify his position as priest and risk failing in his theological mission.

Something bothers me, though; if this scene takes place in the temple, why is there *earth* and not stone beneath their feet? It is a small detail but one that should not be ignored, for it may be a direct invitation to the reader to recall Num 5:17 and the use of "dust," or earth, from the "floor" of the tabernacle which, of course, would have been the ground itself, not a constructed floor, as the tabernacle was a tent. The temple floor, on the other hand, was kept remarkably clean, as Bel and the Dragon reveals: Daniel has to cover the ground with ash from the altar, in order to discern the footprints of the priests who are entering the temple to eat the sacrificial foods. The keen reader who knew this would wonder why Jesus could make an inscription with his finger, unless, that is, he is outside, e.g., by the gate (see Deut 22:13–20), which would make the allusion complete. The emphasis in Deuteronomy 22 is on the proof of a woman's virginity; the focus of everyone's attention is the blood-stained bridal sheet spread out *on the ground* for all to see, in order to prove false witness against her. Is the FG hinting at a similar 'proof' here? Did Jesus convince the elders that she *was* a virgin when he went with her, and that she is, therefore, not an adulteress? There is no *biblical* law condemning mutually consented sex between a married man and a virgin, and if the priests themselves were philanderers (going with temple prostitutes, for instance), they would, indeed, be hypocrites by judging Jesus.

Such an allusion to Jesus' *apparent* polygamy would have been anathema to the early Christian Church, especially under the auspices of Paul, so I have no difficulty imagining that the incident was actually *stricken* from the record. Somewhere along the way, however, an original copy must have been found, or the passage was transferred orally until certain groups were independent enough to authorize its reinstatement. If, however, the tract is not original to the FG, which I find hard to believe, someone must have thought it necessary to include the adulteress' scene, and I think the only logical reason would be to combat later apocryphal texts that (also) hinted at a less than platonic relationship between their 'Christ' and this woman of (alleged) ill-repute! By showing Jesus as the judge, non-Jewish audiences would be under the impression that the woman and her crime had nothing whatever to do with Jesus, and that his mercy was unlimited and unquestionable, even by the authorities.

We can conclude, therefore, that Jesus is playing the role of priest (high priest) and that he is, in some way, intimately associated with the woman brought before him. The outcome of the scene suggests Jesus makes a wise on-the-spot decision. He chooses to defend the will of God over and above his duty as husband or father. Just as Susanna places her life in the hands of God and is rewarded by the intervention of Daniel, so Jesus surrenders Mary's fate to God's will (as he will also do with Lazarus', marking yet another parallel between these two young characters) and is inspired with a rejoinder the accusers cannot counter.

If God does not condemn the adulteress (i.e., Israel), neither can Jesus. Like the high priest in the "Chronicle of Abu'l Fath" (which is, I posit, *based* on Jesus and Mary Magdalene), Jesus reverses the focus of the accusations by openly challenging the credibility of the woman's accusers. We must remember, however, that although there is a mundane scenario taking place here, it has much more profound implications, i.e., it represents a specific stage of the harlot-bride allusion—her trial.

Note how Jesus tells Mary not to "sin again" but the threatening "unless something worse happens" is not added. Thus Mary, in her representational role as the sinning and rejected bride (Israel) is given her first step up the ladder to her ultimate elevation; she is forgiven.

What is vital to remember, however, is that there are *two* men in Mary's life, Jesus and Lazarus, and this is the way it continues, right to the very end. The pattern of the narrative should also be recognised from this point onward, e.g., the Samaritan woman's story is followed by that of the sick young man, then the adulteress is followed by the blind man. This is intentional and part of the symbolic, parallel rise of both Mary and Lazarus. Just as we are told about the first and second 'signs' in order that we can recognise the subsequent signs, we are given this pattern in order that we

follow the pair's intertwining depiction.¹

Polygamy and Protection

A number of the Mishnah tracts (the original codification of oral law, attributed to Judah the Prince, born c. 135 CE) address legal problems *directly* related to the practice of polygamy, suggesting it was very much a factor of everyday life in Jesus' time. There are laws pertaining to two wives, to three, four, and 'multiple' wives, up to a maximum of eighteen according to some, forty-eight according to others! The stipulation of Deut 17:17 is that any future *king of Israel* should not have too many wives, lest one of them turn against him. The distinction between what is allowed for the king and what is permitted for ordinary men is thus a matter of debate but the crux of the issue is not the *act* of polygamy itself but rather *how many* wives is considered proper.

It was not until the Middle Ages, when Rabbi Gershom ben Judah (960–1028 CE) convened a synod and urged Jews to give up the practice of polygamy, that having multiple wives became something one just 'didn't do', at least in public. Many have argued that this was due to the overwhelming influence of Christians who had by then rejected the practice. It would take until the 1950s to become more or less unanimous but there are still factions extant today who deem it their *right*, as the children of Israel, to be polygamous.

So, is Jesus a polygamist or does he have a sexual relationship with Mary outside of marriage? In both the Genesis well scenes emphasis is placed on finding a wife from amongst one's own kin, so again we are forced to consider both eventualities, i.e., Jesus must choose a woman from the northern tribes who will be 'raised' along with the 'rod of Judah' but she *must* bear the offspring of a Josephite. According to scripture, the high priest must marry from within his own tribe (kin) in order to preserve the bloodline of the priesthood.

Throughout my research the spectre of polygamy loomed. I knew it was an issue that needed to be dealt with but at the same time, my focus on the importance of Lazarus diluted any anxiety I may have felt about proposing that Jesus might be polygamous. I rationalized things by thinking of his relationship with Mary as a purely symbolic union. I had been working with the assumption that Lazarus and Mary were *actually* married, and Jesus

¹ There is a potential allusion linking this, a scene about the as yet unidentified Mary, to the as yet unidentified "blind man." The "dust" in this scene is the soil Jesus manipulates with his hand to make a 'sign', to prove a point; the "clay" of John 9 is, similarly, soil Jesus manipulates to reveal a 'sign' and prove a point.

and Mary only *figuratively* so. The entire Mary-Lazarus ‘rods-united’ symbolism permeates the gospel and is necessary to the understanding of Jesus’ intentions but does this preclude Jesus marrying Mary first? There is such an air of ambiguity surrounding this issue. Why was it so necessary to make the two lead characters in the narrative so interchangeable, even down to their conjugal status? The answer has to do with succession and protection, which becomes clear as the FG continues.

Lazarus’ position in the FG is made interchangeable with Jesus’ on several occasions, with the reader uncertain who is actually being spoken about. Who is Mary calling “*Rabbouni*” at the tomb? Who is the father of the child? The ambiguity is cleverly contrived to protect the new dynasty. Confusion and hiding things in plain sight is the simplest yet most effective strategy to foil the plans of one’s enemies to steal something important. In one of my humorous moments while researching (of which there were many!), I suddenly thought of the scene in the film *Spartacus* where everyone stands up and claims to be the man called Spartacus in a bid to protect the real Spartacus. This is what the FG does; it hides the child amongst multiple (well, two) fathers.

It also seems quite plausible now that in his duty as Jesus’ official biographer, as the vindicator of the mission and Jesus’ role in it, the FG’s author has to find a way of removing all potential causes of complaint against his master. The primary issue, of course, is the Samaritan tumult; he works hard in his depiction of Jesus’ mission to avoid placing him in the vicinity (physically or chronologically), yet being an honest chronicler, he does leave clues. An educated man, erudite and analytical, Lazarus uses his skill in both language and rhetoric to create an account that is so brilliantly dualistic and subversive, there is no way an accuser could point the finger and denounce Jesus as either king or high priest (isn’t this exactly what happens in the adulteress’ scene, where Jesus blurs the letters of the law so that neither Mary nor her paramour can be judged?).

For instance, wherever there is a moment in the FG where Jesus seems to be heading for trouble, for conflict that might suggest physical violence, something either miraculous or profound happens to draw attention away from the incident and toward the overall theological message. Wherever there are questions of ritual purity, there is a clever retort. Similarly, matters concerning Jesus’ relationship with Mary, when viewed in the light of Torah, might create unease amongst potential converts and believers, so the dutiful author bends boundaries a little, confuses the issue, so that no one can impugn the King of Israel. As with any recorded history, the account is subjective and biased in favour of the perceived victors, so the FG maintains that no matter what happened during Jesus’ revolt against the institution, he was above the law, untouchable until his work was complete, and blessed by

God in everything he felt compelled to do to meet his goal of resurrecting Shiloh.

In the discussion of the Samaritan woman I argued that Mary and Martha are presented in the FG as sisters in order to allude to the precedent of Rachel and Leah from Genesis, where both married the same man, the younger giving him the sons Joseph and Benjamin. I defy anyone with an open mind to re-read the FG with this possibility in mind and then reject the suggestion as implausible. There are just too many clues! To complete the picture, I offer this potential breakdown of the name Lazarus:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} Laz & + & zarah \\ (from \textit{levath/lavah}) \text{ "to unite"} & + & \text{ "the rivals"} \end{array}$$

The Hebrew word *zarah* is used in 1 Sam 1:6, the story of the two wives of Elkanah, Samuel's father, to mean "rival." If the story were not so poignant, this could be construed as humour. There are several potential examples of wordplay when we deconstruct "Lazarus" and each has a profound relationship to the context within the narrative, thereby reaffirming the interpretation; these will be explained at the appropriate junctures.

By the end of the gospel we see Lazarus responsible for both Jesus' women. It is evident Martha is jealous of Mary's intimacy with Jesus; to have no choice but to watch her bear him the son he is yearning for must be heart-wrenching. One might see a similarity here to Sarah and Hagar's tale, also (Gen 16). Although Sarah brings Hagar into her home herself and thus differs from Martha in that respect, Hagar is clearly younger and able to conceive, she bears Abraham a son but falls out of favour with Sarah, who eventually ousts her from the family home, significantly, removing Ishmael (Hagar's son) from Abraham's inheritance. Under the cross Lazarus is officially made Martha's adopted son and thus the family ties are made fast; he must keep the women together, for the sake of the child. The fate of Ishmael *cannot* befall Jesus' young son.

13

ESCALATION

Not from God

JESUS DECLARES HIMSELF TO BE the “light of the world” and demands of the Jews (i.e., the “scribes and Pharisees” of John 8:3) that they reflect upon who the Father is. They do not *know* Jesus, they don’t ‘see’ that he has come as God’s representative; therefore, they do not truly *know* the Father. They see what they wish to see, believing and judging “by the flesh” rather than by the word of God.

Now this, the FG says, Jesus relates whilst “teaching in the treasury of the temple,” the very heart of the trading establishment. Jesus is, yet again, denouncing the authority of the Jews and is flouting their self-acclaimed right to dictate the nature of the temple. “The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever,” Jesus reminds them. The rightful heir *will* return to claim his inheritance, i.e., stewardship over the *true* house of God.

So far, Jesus has disrupted the outer court of the moneychangers and merchants, he has attempted to convert priests at the Sheep Gate, he has taught inside the temple during a sacred festival, where there are many priests present, and now he has the audacity to stand at the very core of their corrupt little empire! That he is ‘teaching’, and this teaching is so obviously to do with the law, means that he is publicly taking on the role of priest, denouncing the Pharisees’ monopoly on ‘truth’ yet again.

Scholars argue about where the treasury is in the temple; some say the reference alludes only to the donation boxes that were placed around the outer courts but this does not seem significant enough. Josephus, on the other hand, mentions several chambers that actually lined the walls of the inner court (*Wars*. 5.5.2), so one of these may be the treasury. This seems more plausible, for according to Ezra 8:24f, the money first granted by King Artaxerxes to rebuild the temple after the Babylonian exile was distributed amongst twelve leaders of the priestly families, to be guarded “within the chambers of the house of the Lord.” The small collection boxes positioned around the temple are not the focus of Jesus’ attentions. Rather, it is the

allusion to the corrupt priesthood that has acquired great treasures from foreign ‘investors’ that makes Jesus’ stance in the treasury a potent admonition. Jesus stands within the priestly court (a crime in its own right if he is not a priest, or if he is a Samaritan), castigating the very foundations of the establishment.

Again, we see Jesus under the threat of arrest but he is not actually seized; his ‘hour’ has not yet come. It is legitimate to question whether all these instances of Jesus evading arrest, escaping stoning, etc., aren’t due to allies within both the upper echelons of the temple staff (e.g., the gatekeepers, the temple police, even the Roman guards?) lending a conveniently-timed hand. Or perhaps it is the FG author’s invention, tempting us to anticipate an even greater escape!

Jesus becomes more openly hostile toward the Jews, claiming that he has “much to condemn” concerning them. Declaring his role as prophet, as one who speaks the word of God (“I have heard from him”), Jesus fully detaches himself from the ‘world’: “You are from below, I am from above,” he says, reiterating the concept of ‘rebirth from above’, so clearly a stipulation for redemption in John 3. All who fail to believe in the “I AM” that is in Jesus, this authoritative blessing, this ‘spirit’, will be condemned to “die in [their] sins,” Jesus warns. Still, they ask him *who* he is.

The NRSV reads, “Why do I speak to you at all?” (John 8:25) but the Greek infers that Jesus is what he has always claimed to be, i.e., “What I have told you from the beginning”— a man, a prophet, the Restorer, the representative (son) of God. “When you lift up the son of man,” Jesus claims, “then you will know that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own”; the invocation of the divine “I AM” implies that this ‘raising’ will be God’s will. Can it really be God’s will that his ‘son’, his prophet, die such an ungracious and belittling death?

The Greek verb translated as ‘lift up’ is *hupsoó*, which is not a physical action; it denotes exaltation, magnification, a raising of status, etc. Christian tradition suggests this ‘lifting up’ refers to Jesus’ crucifixion but I do not agree. Read as, “When you lift up the son of the man, then you will know ‘I AM’” (which is a bit more sympathetic to the Greek), the scenario looks quite different. Jesus is actually saying: “When the Remnant is exalted, you will know God again.” Of course, it *could* refer to Jesus’ own anticipated elevation as the priestly King of Israel, the redeemed ‘servant’ who is to be ‘lifted up’ to his rightful position amongst the ‘great’ (Isa 52:13) but this seems too self-indulgent, egotistical, and unlikely; the “son of man” ideology, recall, is ambiguous, like many aspects of the FG, i.e., it can mean a person or a group (as in Isaiah 53, for instance). Jesus’ words here are spoken as a conditional and optimistic future event (like ‘seeing’ Nathanael under the fig tree), by which the truth of Jesus’ claim to authority will

ultimately be proven. If this apparently pivotal sign is contingent upon *the Jews*, as Jesus implies, how will this ever come to be? It will soon become clear that this ‘lifting up’ has nothing to do with Jesus’ earthly status or his crucifixion but with the ‘raising’ of Lazarus. Just as the “salvation” that comes from the Jews (John 4:22) turns out to be an action *by* the Jews that allows for the circumstances to suit Jesus’ campaign (i.e., Hyrcanus’ destruction of the temple on Mount Gerizim), so the Jews are to be participants in Jesus’ plan for Lazarus; it simply won’t work without them.

The escalation of Jesus’ argument with the Jews reaches its zenith when he makes an even stronger claim to authority and primacy, a claim that clearly causes the Jews to attempt to stone him.

What Abraham Did

Jesus makes reference to Abraham, accusing the Jews of ignoring the example of the patriarch: “If you are Abraham’s children you would be doing what Abraham did.” What, though, did Abraham do? I suggest that the meaning of this strange statement lies in the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek in Gen 14:18–23.

Abraham encounters Melchizedek, “the righteous king,” the king of Salem and the high priest of El Elyon; Abraham immediately subjects himself to both king-priest and god. He offers tithes, receives a blessing, and swears himself to the divine entity. The Jews, Jesus is insinuating, are loyal to the *wrong* high priest and are thus misled in their devotion to their god *and* they fail to acknowledge the true king, the King of Israel. Jesus, the new Melchizedek, is the true high priest of the god of Abraham and should be treated accordingly but he is rejected and threatened with death. “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4) implies the legitimacy of one who can, with the authority of God, command the priesthood *even without* the traditional hereditary criteria being met.¹ This is what Heb 7:11f is all about and what lies at the root of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus; they claim to ‘know’ his lineage. He cannot be a priest according to *their* rules.

Once again, Jesus reminds his accusers that he is not acting alone.

The most abusive tirade from Jesus appears in John 8:44; the Jews are from their “father the devil,” the “murderer,” the “father of lies.”²

¹ Josephus says of Melchizedek: ‘he was without dispute ... made the priest of God’ (*Ant.* 1.10.2).

² Such a title finds its origins, perhaps, in Jer. 16:19, where the Hebrew word ‘*ab*’ is used in the phrase translated in the NRSV as ‘Our ancestors (i.e., ‘fathers’) have inherited nothing but lies’. The context is one involving God’s rebuke of the propagation of deceit by leaders who have no business claiming divine authority.

*As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests
are banded together; they murder on the road to Shechem,
they commit a monstrous crime.*

Hos 5:9

Jesus has mentioned “the devil” once before, when speaking of his own disciples—one of them is a devil, he claims. His rebuke of the authorities who bear witness against the adulteress is now reflected here: “Which of you convicts me of sin?” The Jews do not understand ‘sin’ because they cannot comprehend the divine words of God. They are not “from God” in the first place, i.e., they are not sanctioned by heaven. This entire episode is a rephrasing of Isa 57:4–5: “Whom are you mocking? ...you offspring of an adulterer and a whore ... Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit....”

This is the point at which Jesus is accused of being a Samaritan and, for the second time, of having “a demon,” i.e., of being mad. His reaction reflects his skill in countering a challenge so obviously a factor of the adulteress’ story; he is being provoked into an incriminating admission. As he had done earlier, though, Jesus manages to manipulate the situation so as not to give the Jews any success; he cannot deny that he is a Samaritan, as he *is* one, and if he denies it, his whole mission is meaningless.

Instead, he challenges only that he is mad but this evokes certain precedents. In 2 Kgs 9:11, the prophet who secretly anoints Jehu is considered mad, and in Jer 29:26 any “madman who plays the prophet” is subject to arrest by the “officers in the house of the Lord.” In the latter scenario, a priest is granted the power to appoint officers of the temple to arrest anyone disturbing the *status quo* by claiming to be a prophet, and it is within this context, I think, Jesus is seen to come under the threat so often.

One must therefore query why the prophet in each instance manages to elude these officers for so long. The answer may lie in the fact that, at least in Jesus’ case, he has allies amongst the authorities sent to arrest him, allies who will again prove helpful, later. On a more symbolic level, though, the identification of “false prophet” with “madman” may indicate once again Jesus’ divine protection. That is, a true prophet cannot be mad because he has “the word of God” in his mouth (Deut 18:18–19).

*I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them
everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet
shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.*

Deut 18:18–19

“Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.”

Ps 105:15

By claiming that he is honouring the Father, Jesus both rejects the Jews' claim and presents himself as a true prophet, without denying his theological/ideological affiliation with the Samaritans. By keeping silent, as he had done in the adulteress' case, Jesus would be failing to defend the *word of God* against false accusation ("if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you"); by calling his authority into question the Jews indeed dishonour the prophet but, more importantly, they dishonour the Father. This is already foreshadowed in v.47, and is supported by v.51, which compares the lack of the "word" with spiritual death. The Jews do reject Jesus, the 'word' and, therefore, God.

*"The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!"
... Because of your great iniquity, your hostility is great.
The prophet is a sentinel for my God over Ephraim, yet a fowler's
snare is on all his ways, and hostility in the house of his God.
Hos 9:7–8*

Hostility in the house of God indeed, and Ephraim's prophet must grapple with a 'snare' set for him time and time again. A further remark in John 8:56–8 criticizes the Jews' pride in claiming to be Abraham's "children." Back in 8:37, Jesus had admitted: "I know that you are descendants of Abraham" but this is a generic, non-committal way of saying, "you are Israelites by birth." Such a concept is far from saying "you are the *children of Abraham*."

Jesus says to the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it, and was glad." What does he mean? Gen 17:17f describes how Abraham is informed of his future son Isaac and the nation which will eventually arise from him (Israel); he falls to the ground, laughing. The word for "rejoiced" in the Greek FG is *agalliao* which, literally translated, implies that Abraham "jumped" with joy but this term can also be used in a figurative sense, to mean "gush, over-react," etc., which is more suitable to the scenario in Genesis. Falling on one's face with laughter is an equivalent depiction of overzealous rejoicing. So, when Jesus makes the claim that Abraham rejoiced that he might see Jesus' day (and notice that Jesus doesn't say "rejoiced to see *me*" but refers to his "day," i.e., his 'hour', his mission to reunify Israel), he symbolically replaces the *Remnant* as the true, anticipated 'child' of Abraham, therefore, as the 'true' Israel, ousting the Jews from their self-acclaimed primary position.

Now here is one of the most Samaritan-like references in the entire FG; the Jews take Jesus literally (never a good idea), mocking his allusion to Abraham "seeing" his day, when Jesus, himself, is "not yet fifty years old," to which Jesus responds: "before Abraham was, I AM." Jesus is not claiming that he, personally, was around when Abraham was but that the

“light of heaven” was, i.e., the prophetic inspiration, or the divine distillation that imbued Moses and other prophets, and which is eternal. This is one of the basic tenets of Samaritan belief. This authority, this power comes from God, the “I AM,” and it is to this belief Jesus again alludes when Pilate is questioning him.

*Joshua ... was the successor of Moses in the prophetic office.
He became, as his name implies, a great saviour of God's elect...
so that he might give Israel its inheritance.*

Sir 46:1

Not Yet Fifty

Because this reference to Jesus is so irreconcilable with the Synoptic tradition, where Luke, for instance, states that Jesus is “about thirty years old” when he begins his mission (Luke 3:23), many scholars have simply chosen to ignore it, or to rationalize “fifty” as a convenient round figure that is used in a generic sense. I am not convinced.

That Jesus is about thirty is likely to be an allusion to 2 Sam 5:4–5, where it is claimed that King David was this age when he began his reign. This is the *expected* understanding of Jesus’ role, that is, as a messianic figure from the line of David, which we know is the foundation of the Synoptic gospels. Let’s broaden our horizons for a moment and consider *alternative* potential precedents: “Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt” (Gen 41:46); and, of course, in the 2 Esdras parallel, Salathiel is away from Palestine for “thirty years.”

If Jesus is broadly considered to be in his early thirties, why would “fifty” be used in the FG as a rounding off or generic term, rather than “forty”? I have (again) a theory: Jesus, in the FG, is the same age as the *naos*, the sacred sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem, which is why later scribes added the addendum of 2:21–2, suggesting that Jesus was referring to the temple as his own body, when he said he would offer the Jews a ‘sign’ to justify his actions in the courtyard (e.g., they, too make the connection between 2:20 and 8:57). If the temple is forty-six years old in April 36 CE, when Jesus makes his public demonstration (as previously discussed), so is Jesus. This means Jesus was born in c.10 BCE, just as the temple was inaugurated.

This is a typically FG method of presenting something very simple in a symbolic way that appears to the majority as something quite arcane and hopeless to interpret but it is quite straight forward, as long as we remember that no number or name in this gospel is without its purpose in the overall structure of the message. In other words, the gospel writer mentions both “forty-six” and “not yet fifty” for a *reason*.

The gospel has been written with a few key events transposed to a more convenient and theologically enlightening place in the chronology. If there were a precise age here, the author's intention of suppressing the truth about the Samaritan tumult would be dashed. By offering a vague "not yet fifty" in this *contemporaneous* scene, the average reader is not drawn into an unnecessary scrutiny of the phrasing. Those who have already surmised the timeline are given confirmation that their efforts have not been wasted.

14

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Blind Man

JESUS HAS SHOWN THE WORLD certain signs that are meant to reveal his authority and intention but these are misinterpreted by the masses who are expecting a Davidic messiah. Jesus is assuming the status of a priest and his audacity has him on the run, a fugitive most of the time, wary and cautious all of the time. Under pressure to complete the ‘works’ given to him by the Father, Jesus must soon begin the formal procedure of inaugurating the new priesthood.

Jesus’ confrontation with the Jews in John 7–8 takes place in October, during the Feast of Tabernacles. By John 10 the narrative has shifted to the Festival of Dedication (John 10:22), which is in December; the ‘blind man’s’ story falls somewhere in between, with symbolic allusions to both events. We are about to witness Jesus performing the most controversial and overt conversion to date from within the temple priesthood itself.

In the FG, blindness is a metaphor for ignorance and misunderstanding. The opening of the eyes implies an opening of the mind, as in: “They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so they cannot understand (Isa 44:18); “Israel’s sentinels are blind they are all without knowledge” (Isa 56:10); “a salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see” (Rev 3:18). The spiritual darkness, the persistent lack of vision, foresight, and even scriptural knowledge is a constant theme in the FG, and it almost always refers to the Pharisees (sometimes it includes the chief priests). In Matt 15:14 and Luke 6:39, the Pharisees are explicitly referred to in terms of the blind leading the blind.

*Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision,
and darkness to you, without revelation.*
Mic 3:6

From this point onward, the narrative becomes more intense; Jesus

seems to be concentrating his efforts in Jerusalem now, without the intervening, frequent stays up north. He tells his disciples, in fact, that the ‘works’ he has been sent to do must be done “while it is day” for “night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). This anticipates a later, very important but short speech (11:9–10), and serves to emphasize the context of confrontation; ‘night’ is a euphemism for evil, danger. Jesus knows, at this point, that his time is limited. He cannot go on making bold declarations, intimidating the Jews with his signs and castigations. It is time to get the new priesthood started, before it is too late.

The young man of John 9, we are told, has been blind from birth and the disciples make the connection between the physical state and the concept of ‘sin’, something Jesus also does, in the scene with the lame man. In John 9, though, Jesus says the blindness has *nothing to do* with the sins of the man, nor of the father; it is another ‘sign’ for the revelation, or glorification, of God’s will.

*...you that are blind, look up and see!
...to magnify his teaching and make it glorious.
Isa 42:18, 21*

Some pertinent details suggest who the blind man is; Jesus seems to *know* that the father of the man is not sinful, *nor* the boy; he declares this in such a casual manner, suggesting he is already acquainted with them:

★ In John 7:38 Jesus had called out to the crowd of priests “let the one who believes in me drink.” He is searching for his successor, his perfect protégée, the young Lazarus, son of Nicodemus.

★ The birth/rebirth theme links this scene with both Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus and the corresponding promised ‘rebirth’ of his young son into a better life.

★ The transfer of responsibility from the boy of John 4, whose future lay in the hands of his parents, to the young man who is now ‘of age’, links the two characters.

★ The inference that he was “about to die” meant, in effect, his childhood was about to end; he was about to become a man of legal age (and thus enter into the ‘world’ Jesus claims has no ‘life’ in it). If the boy was twelve then, he is thirteen now, legally a man.

★ The concept of ‘begging’ is familiar to both scenarios, first by the father, then, aptly, the son.

The blind man is Nicodemus’ son, Lazarus.

Born into the blind world, Lazarus is as blind as anyone else not reborn from above, so this blindness is both metaphorical and inevitable. It does not have anything to do with the type of ‘sin’ the disciples imagine, which suggests a punishment for wrongdoing; rather, it relates to a general sense of ignorance and being led up the wrong path. Because of his father’s foresight, however, the young man has been guaranteed this moment of insight; he has been promised ‘life’.

Young Jewish men (at this time in Palestine) make a decision as to which sect, if any, they intend to be affiliated. Josephus, also of priestly stock, claims that he was a novice in each of the three sects, i.e., Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees, before making the choice, at the age of nineteen, to adhere to the Pharisees (*Life*, 1.2). The blind man’s age is alluded to twice (vv. 21, 23), implying that he is ‘of age’ e.g., to make his *own* choice regarding sectarian membership; it is no longer a matter for his parents to influence. This emphasis is significant as it also implies the character’s youthfulness, for why else would a parent have to state that he is ‘of age’ unless he was on the cusp of adulthood?

The son of a father who is both priest and Pharisee, this young man is seemingly destined to follow suit, which is why Nicodemus plans ahead and ensures that his son will follow in his footsteps as the ‘servant of the king’ (i.e., Jesus’ servant) but *not* as a Pharisee.

*...if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done,
considers, and does not do likewise ... he shall not die for
his father’s iniquity; he shall surely live.*

Ezek 18:14–17

At the moment of truth, when the young man is due to make his entry into the Pharisaic sect, perhaps, Jesus steps in and steals more than just the scene. He spits on the ground in order to make a small amount of clay with which he anoints the blind man’s eyes (to have someone else’s spittle touch you would have meant dishonour, an uncleanness to be ritually remedied. Any onlookers must have thought these two men completely mad). The Greek verb used for “anointing” here is *chrío*; nearly every instance of individuals being commissioned, chosen, delegated, etc., in the LXX, incorporates or specifies this verb. As the blind man is the only figure in the FG who is explicitly *touched* by Jesus, we must understand this application in terms of *election* (just as Jesus was elected by the symbolic resting of the hand of God—the dove—on his head).

The preparation for the new kingdom is, in a sense, an act of destruction *and* creation, as Jesus infers when he storms the temple. The lame man’s tale reveals the infirmity at the heart of Israel and demonstrates the relative ease with which spiritual bondage can be rejected and the

oppressors destroyed. In the story of the blind man we see more of the creation aspect (a renewal) for in the production of clay, and in its application, Jesus is understood to be performing a symbolic act of creation as part of the works of God.

Provocative imagery echoes Gen 2:7, where the inspiration of the “dust of the ground” is the pinnacle of God’s work. Having moulded Adam from the earth, God witnesses the increasing degradation and profanity of his creation. Israel anticipates the day when God, as the divine potter will remould the “spoilt” Israel making it “good to him” once more, as it was in the beginning (Jer 18:6). With Adam began the kingdom of men, with Jesus, the FG suggests, begins the kingdom of God.

In the parallel of 2 Esdras, both dust and spittle are mentioned; Adam’s foundation of dust is contrasted with the “growing” mind (7:62). The main gist of the passage is that the mind is free to transcend the flesh, so there is no real excuse for being unfaithful to the commandments (and this is echoed in John 16). The spittle is compared to “the other nations that have descended from Adam,” i.e., the non-Israelites who domineer and oppress God’s elect (2 Esd 6:56).

Putting these together, in the context of the anointing or election of the man who is ‘blind’, we get this: Jesus uses the spittle and the dust to make a clay, which he places over the eyes of the young man to represent the corrupt, impure world that closes his eyes to the ‘truth’ and to God. He is then sent to the Pool of Siloam to wash away the clay, i.e., to wash away the ‘world’ and all its iniquities.

In Hebrew, the word for Siloam is Shiloah (i.e., Shiloh), which appears in Isa 8:5–8; the context is one of a warning. The Samaritans have, it seems, threatened to take Jerusalem but God responds by claiming they do not deserve it because they have refused “the waters of Shiloah that flow gently.” For this they must endure the torrent from the north (i.e., Assyria, under the guise of the River Euphrates), which will act as a sweeping judgement. It must be assumed, then, that those who *do* accept the waters of Shiloah—*those who accept Shiloh*—will be allowed to ‘take’ Jerusalem. This bodes well, then, for Jesus.

The young man, Lazarus, obediently takes himself to the pool and washes away the filth of the ‘world’ that has made him, figuratively, blind. He accepts the “living water” of this, the holiest mikvah: it is from the Pool of Siloam that the priests gather pitchers of water for the temple libations on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The pool is thus inextricably linked to the priesthood and ritual cleansing but it also marks a vital turning point in Jesus’ campaign, for it is at this juncture the young Lazarus comprehends and accepts what is expected of him.

This scene, wonderfully succinct yet packed with information, tells us

that Jesus has found his protégée, his confidant, for he trusts this young man with his most profound secrets. Interestingly, the theological concept of the mikvah entails a spiritual rebirth, a rise in spiritual status, or a transformation. It is used when consecrating a new priest, when initiating a ‘coming-of-age’ (*mitzvah*), and when converting a proselyte.

Unlike the lame man (Peter), the young Lazarus comes back seeing. The connection becomes clearer in John 9:11, when he tells the crowd that Jesus had said to him, “Go to Siloam and wash” making the command, in effect, “Accept Shiloh and wash away your past life.” The crux of the matter is that Nicodemus’ son, the son of a man of high repute, great authority, and priestly heritage, has openly and unabashedly made a *choice*—yet another long-running theme throughout the FG. He has made a choice to serve Jesus, *not* the institution.

The immediate reaction of the “neighbours” and those who recognise this ‘blind man’ is to query whether he is truly the “beggar” they had seen on the streets. Elsewhere in the NT, the term “begging” (or “beggar”) is used in a very illuminating context; in Gal 4:8–9, for instance, the life before conversion (to the ‘way’ of Jesus) is seen as an enslavement, with the old laws (i.e., Pharisaic law) imposing a “begging” spirit upon men, which they must overcome. In Eccl 40:28–30, however, “begging” is a worse fate than death, i.e., “one who is intelligent and well instructed guards against” it. The one for whom a father had begged, once destined to grow up to be a “beggar” himself, is now transformed into something unrecognisable (cf. Luke’s Lazarus [16:19f] who is also depicted as a “beggar” yet rises to the right hand of Abraham. Luke’s gospel is the closest to the FG in date and substance, I suggest).

*He raises up the poor from the dust...
to make them sit with princes
And inherit a seat of honour.
1 Sam 2:8*

The blind man is taken not to a temple priest, which is the accepted procedure for the final assurance of cleanliness after an ailment or disease (Lev 12ff) but to the Pharisees, whose first reaction is to deny, or refuse to believe that the man was blind *in the first place*, demonstrating, yet again, their inability to *see* and *understand*. Ironically, however, by taking the ‘blindness’ literally, as a physical condition, they imply Lazarus *is* sighted and thus confirm this blindness *symbolic* within the narrative.

The Pharisees have a warrant out for Jesus’ arrest yet here he is *again*, performing such deeds on the Sabbath. This is apparently all they are interested in, just as in the case with the lame man. The young Lazarus, who is keen to tell everyone that “the man called Jesus” put clay on his eyes and

made him see, is asked where the so-called ‘healer’ is but, instead of betraying Jesus’ whereabouts, as Peter had done, he says he does not know (this is the first attempt to get the young man to incriminate Jesus). He has already proven more trustworthy than Peter. Asked what he “says” about Jesus, the blind man replies: “He is a prophet” (John 9:17; the second attempt). He does not say, “He is the messiah.” A third time, the young convert is pressed into incriminating Jesus (John 9:24f) but, just as in Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus, the emphasis is shifted and those who seem to be seeking insight expose their own ignorance. Like Jesus with the adulteress, Nicodemus’ son manages to turn the tables, making the Pharisees seem ignorant and desperate.

“You are his disciple,” they accuse him, meaning it to be a derogatory remark but the comment simply confirms what has been going on in the scene, i.e., a conversion. Claiming to be the “disciples of Moses,” the Pharisees think they maintain their loyalty to the law but they expose their fundamental ignorance of who Jesus is. They know that God spoke to Moses, they say, but “this man” is an unknown quantity; they do not know where he comes from. Have they not admitted to knowing his mother and father, and to his coming from Galilee? It is his self-acclaimed authority, his ‘power’ that is a mystery to them because, as Jesus himself has told them to their faces, *they* are not ‘from God’ and thus cannot recognise it. No wonder they can have such a man “amongst” them and not know him. In Jesus’ symbolic affiliation with the secret realm of Arzareth, this apparent confusion, contradiction even, is justified.

*There are those who rebel against the light...
and do not stay in its paths...
they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.*
Job 24:13, 16

There is another clue, here, to the link between Nicodemus and the blind man. In John 3:2, Nicodemus declares: “we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” In 9:33, we hear his son say with confidence to the Pharisees: “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” Lazarus, the boy left in Capernaum while his father seeks out for him a place in the new order, now echoes his father’s conviction.

So, three times this once ‘blind’ man is in a predicament and must choose to betray, or be loyal to, Jesus. Three times he proves his conversion is complete. This intentional forerunner to Peter’s three denials serves to illustrate a rivalry that will increase in intensity throughout the gospel—a rather one-sided rivalry, perhaps, between Jesus’ chosen successor and the aging priest whose ambition gets the better of him.

Having been taught by his father everything Jesus had explained, Nicodemus' son becomes Jesus' elected 'son' who will eventually be his successor. Rather than becoming one of those who steal the rights of the firstborn (e.g., the Pharisees), he is given the sanction and status *of* the firstborn. Lazarus now represents the ideal Israel, the Israel Jesus anticipates will be 'risen'—and the Pool of Siloam sits silently in anticipation of its most significant role.

Baptism of the Soul

Compare what has just taken place in John 9 to these excerpts from Ps 51:

- **blot out my transgressions;** “clay on my eyes”
- **Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin;** “wash in the Pool of Siloam”
- **Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me;** born blind / concept of “who sinned?”
- **You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart;** a personal conversion / hidden wisdom
- **put a new and right spirit within me'** the 'spirit' is inherited
- **Then I will teach transgressors your ways;** teacher of Israel (and *parakletos*)
- **and sinners will return to you;** other conversions

This is the sort of initiation John performs when we first encounter him, in John 1. It is a cleansing ritual that demands “truth in the inward being” (the sort of baptism Josephus describes in his apparent reference to John). Only Jesus, it is said, can baptise with the Holy Spirit (the inspirational, or authoritative 'spirit' from God), and this implies something beyond the basic spiritual cleansing, i.e., it implies election and transference of knowledge and authority:

He shall ... impart true knowledge and righteous knowledge to those who have chosen the Way. ... (He) will instruct them in the mysteries of marvellous truth....

Manuel of Discipline, DSS

Not only does this provide a precedent for the conversion scene itself, it also anticipates the future role of the successor, e.g., to be a teacher, so that others may also find the 'way'.

Perturbed Pharisees

The reaction of the parents in John 9:22 is: "...he is of age; ask him." They are justifiably afraid of the wrath of the Jews. The focus of the Pharisees' anger is upon the *choice* the son has made and the apparent affirmation of Jesus' authority, so they threaten excommunication if there is any further rebellion from the family. The Pharisees are taking this particular action very seriously indeed, one may even say, personally. Already assuming his (father's) role as teacher, Lazarus infuriates the Pharisees and he is driven out. Jesus had warned that this rebirth would be a painful one, and things have only just got started! Some scholars see problems in the historicity of the alleged threats of excommunication (John 9:22) against those who confessed Jesus to be the messiah, for it was not a crime to support a messianic contender. Jesus, in the FG however, is *not* a messianic contender in the traditional, or common, sense; it is, rather, because his followers are seen to be adopting an alternative religious *identity* that they are dismissed from the synagogue. They are rejecting authority and familiar tradition.

The only other time a synagogue has been mentioned is when Jesus is teaching there, in John 6, where the confusion over his 'flesh and blood' sends some away thinking him to be mad. This synagogue is in Capernaum, the town in which the 'blind man', as a youth, had been living; the town in which his father, Nicodemus is an elder and, perhaps, a chief of the synagogue and lesser Sanhedrin. Obligated to carry out the will of the greater council in Jerusalem, Nicodemus would be subject to their ruling. The Sanhedrin has a tiered excommunication practise, called *herem*, ranging from a very mild slap on the wrist and 'don't come to the synagogue for a week' to 'you are dead to Israel'. Although the degree of excommunication we are seeing in John 9 seems to be relatively mild, in effect, it would, if the parents confess allegiance to Jesus, remove Nicodemus from his life-long role as a public teacher. It is a preventative measure intended to thwart any attempt to spread the word about Jesus, or to allow Jesus access to the synagogue for recruiting purposes.

The Pharisees have taken all this as such a personal offence because Jesus is openly commissioning one of their own for his cause; one can even suggest that the entire episode has been fabricated, planned, for why else would the young boy go through with the charade of pretending to join the Pharisees (when his father has already promised him to Jesus), if not to help Jesus in his plan to create a 'sign'? Jesus, with the help of the young man is, in effect, publicly humiliating the Pharisees. It was one thing to see him making a fool of the pathetic ordinary priests in and around the temple but it is preposterous to think that any of their *own* people should follow him (cf. John 7)! When the young man is finally driven out of the synagogue the Pharisees, in their ignorance, believe they have gained the advantage but

there is an ironic twist here, for this detachment is *just* what Jesus intends for his convert.

Echoing the scene with the ‘lame man’ once more, Jesus “finds” the one ‘healed’ and tests him; “Do you want to be made well?” is now “Do you believe in the son of man?” This acts as another clue in linking Nicodemus with the official’s son, for it was *only* to Nicodemus that Jesus mentioned the ‘son of man’ in a context of belief and knowledge; now he is asking Lazarus, who has just washed the ‘world’ from his eyes, if *he* believes as his father does. When the lad answers, he does so with the question, ‘Who is he?’ (i.e., he requests knowledge) and Jesus answers in exactly the same words as he responded to Mary’s (the Samaritan woman’s) declaration that she knew the Restorer, was coming: “you are speaking with him,” thereby once again linking the two young but pivotal characters.

Jesus declares that he has come to make the blind see, and to blind those who do see. What does this mean? The whole idea of blindness, remember, is metaphorical; it is equated to spiritual darkness, ignorance, a lack of mental, not physical vision. In Isaiah’s long and passionate account of God’s plea for the return of his people, the deaf and the blind are described as those who are deaf and blind to the god of their ancestor, Abraham. Abraham’s ‘offspring’ Israel (the commission name of Jacob) is described as God’s friend, his servant. We already know, though, that Israel is divided, with the loyal Remnant and the iniquitous majority distanced by religious argument and legal superficialities. Jesus has also, symbolically, replaced himself (and “those given” to him, i.e., the Remnant, represented by Nathanael) as the ‘offspring’ of Abraham, the “servant,” so making the sighted blind, must have another meaning: “Who is blind but my servant Who is blind like my dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the Lord? (Isa 42:19). The “dedicated one,” the Remnant, and the “servant” Jesus, are blind not to the one true god but to the ‘world’ and its temptations—the false worship, the oppressing laws, the “lies.” To make the sighted blind, Jesus implies, is to open their eyes to the truth, the truth that will set them free from the darkness of an ignorant world (John 8:32).

The Pharisees, their ears against the wall yet again, overhear Jesus’ comments and, as usual, reveal their own ignorance in an ironic response: “Surely we are not blind, are we?” By saying they ‘see’ the Pharisees admit their sin (and here, the sin is parallel to that attributed to the ‘lame man’); they *cannot* see the ‘truth’ and so they *are* blind.

*Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your own sight...
have rejected the instruction of the Lord ... and have
despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*
Isa 5:21, 24

For now I am bringing you to judgement for saying "I have not sinned."

Jer 2:35

Just as Nicodemus' portrayal revealed the need to release one's mind from long held presumptions and inhibitions, so the father's son follows suit, teaching us not to see with the eyes but with the mind. In other words, 'see' what the gospel is saying by understanding what *isn't* obvious, rather than be like the Pharisees, who reckon they know the scriptures inside out because they have memorized them but who fail to comprehend them. This is the key to the kingdom—the key to "Siloam" (Shiloh)!

Bad Shepherds

Jesus reiterates his rejection of the children of the "liar" (those who follow the "father of lies" Caiaphas, i.e., the incumbent priesthood) and also his insistence that he and his chosen ones are the means to Israel's redemption. The priesthood consists of "thieves and bandits"; they have not entered through the "gate." Although many interpreters have difficulty with the juxtaposition of 'shepherd' and 'gate' in the same analogy, suggesting, even, a corruption of the original text, there is really no problem.

The gate, metaphorically, has two distinct meanings; it is a place of legal authentication (because it is at the gates of the city that elders and judges sit, e.g., Gen 23:10; 2 Sam 15:2; Ruth 3:11–4:1), and a place of union with the divine (as in Gen 28:17, where Jacob has his dream of the ladder). The one who enters 'by the gate' has authority and is in contact with God, while those who "climb in by another way" are illegitimate "shepherds" who do not know God, e.g., the "thieves and robbers" who make the house of God an illicit "market place," a "den of robbers" (Jer 7:11). The "sheep" are the elect, the Remnant, the converted (as in Mic 2:12–13). Their "fold," *aulen* in the Greek ("court/yard"), is actually the *locus* of worship, i.e., in this context, the temple.

The followers of the true shepherd, the righteous high priest, are called by name (as demonstrated first in the early scenes of the FG narrative, where the disciples, each representing a tribe, are called by name) and "he leads them out" (literally, in due course, out of the temple!) through the gate that he, himself, represents (John 10:9). Those who are converted have 'life' (are reborn) and those who are not are 'destroyed' not by God but by the ineptitude and iniquity of the "thieves and robbers" and their "father of lies." There is none so blind as one who *will not* see. The analogy is lost on the Jews.

Jesus persists, with a clear allusion to Ezekiel 34 (and several chapters of Jeremiah, especially 23:1–4), where God chastises the bad shepherds who

have been “feeding [them]selves” on the fat of the sheep, using their wool, leaving them to get sick and die, scattering them and making them vulnerable to attack by wild animals (Ezek 34:2–6). God continues: “I am against the shepherds ... I will rescue my sheep from their mouths” (34:10).

*Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks
... But you shall be called priests
of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God.
Isa 61:5–6*

One of the most talked about passages of the FG is Jesus’ comment: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice” (John 10:16). Interpretations abound, including that he meant the Greeks (which the FG Jesus would have cringed at). I suggest it simply means the scattered Remnant. Some are in Samaria, many off in Arzareth somewhere, but they must be gathered so that there will ‘be one flock’ with one ‘shepherd’.

God, according to Jesus, loves him because he “lay[s] down [his] life in order to take it up again” (John 10:17). In the Greek text of the FG, the word translated as “life” is *psyche*, which actually means “soul,” whereas *bios*, or *zoe*, better imply ‘life’. Jesus does *not* lay down his ‘life’ he lays down his ‘soul’. This, once again, connects him to the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 53, who is said to have “poured out [his soul] to death,” meaning he made himself *vulnerable* to death by doing the works of God (cf. Joel 2:28), and for this he is to receive “a portion with the great.” This is, perhaps, one of the earliest clues pertaining to Jesus’ ultimate crucifixion and the subsequent events. Division amongst the Jews again reveals that some of the priests, Pharisees, Levites, etc., follow Jesus, while others presume him insane.

The Festival of Dedication is an apt arena in which to play out Jesus’ final public stand against his opponents; it is a commemoration of the recovery and purification of the temple by Judas Maccabee (164 BCE), after the abomination of illegitimate (Syrian) occupants (1 Macc 4:52f). So too is the reference to his standing within the portico of Solomon significant, for it is Solomon’s dedication (1 Kgs 8:65) that makes the site of the temple in Jerusalem a *fait accompli* (recall that in John 7 Jesus is at the Feast of Tabernacles, the festival at which Solomon performs this original dedication).

Standing in the footsteps of Solomon, Jesus’ authority and intent are reaffirmed, i.e., as Solomon was granted the authority to establish a new house, so Jesus claims a similar authority. With the ritualistic election of Nicodemus’ son, he demonstrates that the new priesthood is underway; the new house of God is being created. Just as in the rebuilding of original

temple described in Nehemiah/Ezra, the process begins with the Sheep Gate, which is where we see Jesus' first symbolically 'rebuilding' act, i.e., the attempted liberation of the ordinary priests through Peter.

It is one thing to claim authority but quite another to claim, or prove, legitimacy. The 'name' of God dwells wherever the Ark is, and only for as long as the people heed the commandments (see 1 Kgs 8:6f). The Ark is *no* longer in the temple; the people *no* longer heed the word of God, so God is *no* longer in the temple. Jesus wants to reinstate the seat of God at Shiloh, so it seems to me that he either *does* know or he *thinks* he knows, where the missing Ark is. It is really the *only* thing that will legitimize his new house of God. Did he, one may wonder, 'come across' it or discern its whereabouts whilst on his travels (as Salathiel)? Was this discovery what instigated this campaign?

In response to the demand for Jesus to reveal himself as the messiah (John 10:24), Jesus repeats his claim that he has already shown the people *who* he is and by *what* authority he performs his works, but that it is *they* who have failed to believe and so identification with the Davidic messiah is again rejected in the FG. "The Father and I are one," he says, not implying that he is a divine being, as the Jews interpret it, but simply that he is God's representative (his 'son' in the manner explained). Or could it imply that he and the Father are 'one' because of the Ark (with Jesus' holiness being directly contingent on his connection to the Shekinah, the divine force contained within the Ark)? It should be noted that in both Heb 9:4 and Rev 11:19, in the description of the *ideal* temple, the Ark has pride of place once again, suggesting the return of Israel to the commandments of God and the consequent return of the Holy Spirit to dwell there.

The Jews do not believe, therefore they do not "belong to [Jesus'] sheep." They have no place in the new "house." Alluding to the passage in Deut 14:1, where God declares, "You are the children of the Lord your God," Jesus defends his intimacy with the Father. He relies on the law of the scribes and Pharisees, something with which they can actually identify, to get the idea across. If those who had been given the word of God at Sinai are reckoned the 'children' of God, does that not make them 'gods' also (not deities but in some way imbued with the divine, i.e., they have 'holiness' within them because God chooses them)? Why then, Jesus asks, should he not be able to call himself a 'son' of God, as he, too (so he claims) has received the word of God (and this is a good time to recall the 2 Esdras account of Salathiel's calling)?

Escaping a stoning and an arrest, *yet again*, Jesus returns to Bethabara, on the northern tip of the Dead Sea, on the Jordan salt flats, where John had been baptising earlier. It seems Jesus has a strong following here and this is doubly significant, for Josephus tells us that there is a general amalgamation

of dissenters, renegades, and revolutionists who live in this area, just across the Jordan (*Ant.* 17.10.2), adding fuel to the fire regarding the level of militancy in Jesus' mission. On the other hand, we should take note that John is *not* here, and he is spoken of in the *past* tense and in a way that, once again, subjugates him to Jesus. A parting of the ways has happened and/or John is now dead.

There is no way of knowing precisely how long Jesus stays in Bethabara but the subsequent calendar clue suggests he remains across the Jordan for about a year. It is during this period, I suggest, that Jesus has further contact with the Galileans, who, according to John 4, have an interest in his campaign. Recall that the scenario of the feeding in Bashan (John 6) is a theological manipulation of the Samaritan tumult, which I claim occurs (chronologically) just before the 'raising of Lazarus' account, and which potentially includes the Galileans as the troublemakers. The sequence of Jesus going to a site of known rebels for a prolonged stay, leading what turns out to be a politically charged and ultimately violent demonstration on Mount Gerizim, then having the necessary 'forces' on hand to stage the event to come (the Lazarus situation, below), and then later referring to supporters who would "fight" for him, suggests Jesus *does* invite the "revolutionists" to join his mission. It is another error of judgement, however.

It is also during this retreat that Mary Magdalene becomes pregnant.

